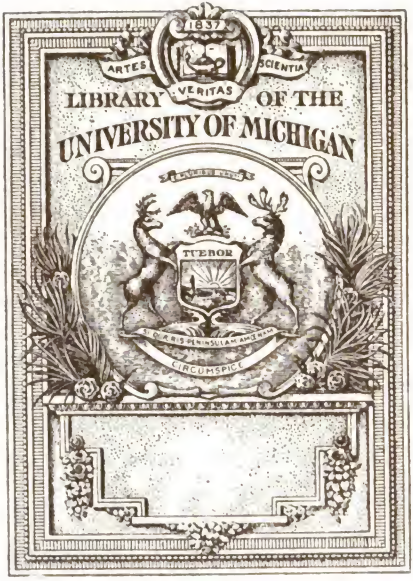
The mothers

Georg Hirschfeld



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THE MOTHERS



VOLUME XVIII

The Drama League Series of Plays

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THE MOTHERS

BY
GEORG HIRSCHFELD



TRANSLATED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
LUDWIG LEWISOHN

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1916

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The modern German drama in prose, more perhaps than the drama of any age or country, has set itself the aim of understanding the nature and the qualities of human life. This effort, made and pursued with an almost consecrated earnestness, has necessarily tended to break the moulds into which the traditional art of the theatre had been cast. We cannot too often remind ourselves that that art made its selection from the material of life not only under the limitations of a few essential conventions, but of many that were unmeaning and arbitrary. In extreme cases it ceased to bear any relation to reality and became an artifice sustained only by its own fragile laws and living only during the brief and hectic hours of actual representation. Congreve is a great writer and Scribe a very small one. As imitations or interpretations of human life the plays of neither have more meaning than a game of billiards. But an imitation or interpretation of human life is the

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one aim of every serious playwright of modern Germany. Hence it is plain that the modern German drama which has been called "static" and "quietist" and other names in which is implicit a comparison with the traditional artifices of the stage, should not be judged by the light of such a comparison at all. It should be judged by its own innermost intention which is, like the intention of every other sound and living human art, to offer what Matthew Arnold long ago demanded of the highest poetry—a criticism of life.

I have used the expression: interpretation of human life. And that is, in truth, just what Arnold meant in his famous phrase. But a distinction is to be made at once. For we shall not understand the drama of modern Germany if we imagine that it interprets life by applying the measure of any anterior prejudice, any rigid standard, any assumption of what it ought to be. For "moral judgments," as Hauptmann says in *Gabriel Schilling's Flight*, "are, of course, only ways of avoiding thought and understanding." Men live, inevitably, by embracing very different sets of values. These values, as they are embodied in the practice of life, are set forth through character in the German drama. But the playwright scrupulously refrains from assigning to

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any such set of values an absolute or even a superior validity. The meaning of life is not summed up in a moral or a lesson or even a principle. The meaning of life is—life! From the concrete and particular human truth, if it be full and exact, arise the reflections and emotions that reach into eternity. Thus there are no heroes in the modern German drama and very few villains. But many of the souls who people that stage illustrate the struggle of all our modern world for new values and ideals by which life can be made more tolerable and more meaningful.

It is quite clear, then, why this drama has been called "static" and "quietist." Like the drama of every age it exhibits character in action. But its aim is truth. And violent and external action is not a note of our civilization in its normal state. Even our gravest conflicts, those that arise from the clash between social and personal morality, are apt to be devoid of loud activity and sudden catastrophes, of events so involved as to arouse suspense of the cruder kind, of moral differentiations so gross and definite as to flatter the prejudices and soothe the self-approbation of the romantic crowd. No, the modern German drama stresses the moral and spiritual atmosphere into which men are born, the in-

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fluences which make and often enslave them, the struggle of the true personality to possess itself, to become what it was really destined to be. In a word, the supreme concern of this art is with character—character which makes life and is fate. And thus it happens that to each one of the naturalistic playwrights of modern Germany, not to Hauptmann and Schnitzler alone, will be granted some day Hazlitt's noble and yet sober praise of Hogarth, that "he has left behind him as many memorable faces, in their memorable movements, as perhaps most of us remember in the course of our lives, and has thus doubled the quantity of our observation."

The American reader of this series will ask at once: But does so austere and uncompromising an art hold the stage? It does. And it does so by virtue of the level of taste attained by the contemporary German audience, and by virtue of the organization of the German stage. In the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and the Swiss Republic (primarily, of course, in the first) there exist to-day, in addition to the numerous stages due to private enterprise, over ninety municipal and over thirty court theatres. These one hundred and twenty stages support stock companies of serious artistic

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attainments and are quite independent of the hunt for the exaggerated profits of a long run. They are forced, on the contrary, to present very varied programs to satisfy the exacting demands of the communities which they serve. The results of this state of affairs may be instructively illustrated by recording some of the plays presented in the German speaking countries of central Europe during a given month. I select April, 1913, a typical spring month toward the close of the season, less brilliant and varied in its offerings than a typical winter month.

During this month the German people were able to witness two plays of Sophocles and nineteen of Shakespeare. The latter included not only the great tragedies and romantic comedies (*The Merchant of Venice* leading with twenty performances) but also *Cymbeline*, *Richard II*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *The Comedy of Errors*. In the same month were presented four plays of Molière and one of Beaumarchais. Seven plays by Goethe were given (the first part of *Faust* leading with twenty-two performances), ten by Schiller, and three by Lessing. Kleist and Grillparzer are each represented by five plays, Hebbel, the great German dramatist of the silver age, by nine. During this same month it was

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possible to see on German stages every one of the prose plays of Ibsen, from *The League of Youth* to *When We Dead Awaken—The Pillars of Society* seven times, *Hedda Gabler* twelve times, *The Lady from the Sea* five times, *Ghosts* seven, and even *Little Eyolf* five times. I now pass on to our immediate contemporaries. There were presented fourteen plays by Hauptmann, twelve by Sudermann, eight by Schnitzler, four by Hartleben, three by Halbe, three by Dreyer, eight by Wedekind, two by Hofmannsthal, three by Maeterlink, one each by Rostand, Brieux, Tchechov, and Gorky, two by Galsworthy, and seven by Shaw. Nor must I fail to add seven plays by Strindberg and three by Oscar Wilde, and the fact that I have omitted such admirable names as Schoenherr, Keyserling, and Thoma on the ground that their reputations have not yet become international. These names and numbers, I take it, will bring home to us more effectively than anything else a just appreciation of the modern German theatre and of the drama of character and ideas which it supports. To reflect upon them, moreover, may not be without value to those who have seriously at heart the future fortunes of the American drama.

LUDWIG LEWISOHN.

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SPECIAL INTRODUCTION

Georg Hirschfeld is the author of but three plays that count: *At Home* (1896), *The Mothers* (1896), and *Agnes Jordan* (1898). His later works have excellent single characters and passages strongly executed. But he never again succeeded in expressing in dramatic form the peculiar note of his narrow but very intense talent. One may readily explain this apparent poverty. It is in youth that we are extraordinarily sensitive to impressions: it is in youth that these impressions cling and are woven into the very texture of our souls. Experience, reflection, the mature will attempting to master reality—all these tend to order our impressions, to synthesize them and thus to dull their keenness and obliterate their outlines. And what imparts to Hirschfeld's three plays their attractiveness and power is his reproduction in them of the impressions of his nervous and receptive youth. Swinburne somewhere describes a perfect translation under the figure of wine being

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poured from one goblet into another without the loss of a single drop. The figure may apply to Hirschfeld's faultless translation into dramatic art of that corner of reality which he was destined to observe.

He was born in Berlin in 1873 and the scene of his plays is laid in the city of his birth. But we must not think of the brilliant metropolis of the night cafés, and Max Reinhardt's theatres and Richard Strauss's music. It is the older Berlin which has continued to exist in the great art-centre and imperial capital: the peculiar Prussian city with its rather rigid middle class and its exuberantly characteristic common people, with its very marked folk-ways and folk-speech. Hirschfeld knows both that populace and that middle class—the former full of raciness and wit and marrowy experience of the coarser strains of life; the latter with its dense moral atmosphere, its pathetic dedication to an ideal of duty not always intelligently or discriminatingly embraced, with its external plainness of aspect and its hidden wealth of deep and beautiful feeling.

The American reader of Hirschfeld's plays will scarcely suspect the further fact that the middle-class characters in his plays are, like himself, of Jewish birth. This is indicated in *The Mothers*, for in-

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stance, by a very few slight shadings in the speech of Mrs. Dora Frey and her brother-in-law, and by one clear remark of Mrs. Printz. What is interesting is that the completest veracity of delineation required no more. The characteristic modes of thought and feeling of the North German and those of the Jew who has discarded his archaic Orientalism are profoundly alike. Both have the same earnestness in the conduct of life, the same strong family sense, the hard, practical intelligence—the capacity, too, of producing now and then individuals of the finest artistic sensitiveness and power: men like Robert Frey in *The Mothers*, like Georg Hirschfeld himself.

By instinct and by environment Hirschfeld was inevitably a naturalist. Yet he was born late enough to escape naturalism of the militant type. He does not inveigh against alcohol, as even Hauptmann does in *Before Dawn*, nor against the narrowness of family life, as even Schnitzler did in *The Legacy*, or against injustice, as Galsworthy does in play after play. His art is quite pure and quite severe. He is never polemic: he takes no sides. Thus he is saved from the fault of entering into the inner life of some of his characters and portraying others from without. Each character states his case not

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in terms of argument but of life: even the unlovely Ludwig Frey, it will be observed, has his moment of utterly genuine emotion. And that is assuredly the deepest of all facts concerning human life. Each man has a case which he feels passionately to be right or tragic, and which, in the sanctuary of his own soul, he champions against the world. A constant perception of this fact gives Hirschfeld's plays their elegiac tinge, the note of melancholy beauty that hovers over his ugliest reality. It is impossible to see men and women from within and to be harsh and accusing. . . .

Despite its appearance in the same season with Hauptmann's *Sunken Bell* and Schnitzler's *Light o' Love*, *The Mothers* achieved a stage success of the first order. In the twenty years since its original performance it has become a part of the repertory of many of the German stages. From the records accessible to me I observe, for instance, that it was acted on the nights of January 27, 28, and 30, 1914, at the Thalia Theatre in Breslau. Later performances have undoubtedly been given. We are dealing, at all events, not only with a piece of admirable dramatic literature but with a successful stage play.

Technically *The Mothers* displays a fine use of the

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accepted methods of the naturalistic drama rather than any originality of structure. The play presents a spiritual crisis through the culmination of events that lie two years in the past. Hence the length and elaborateness of the first act which must relate these events and help us realize the characters that made them inevitable. In this task Hirschfeld has succeeded eminently well. The rhythm of life and the illusion of reality are sustained throughout: insensibly the reader or spectator lives himself into this family and its history—knows not only Hedwig and her friend, the uncle and the remarkable mother: he knows also the dead father and the absent brother and is penetrated with the mellow autumnal light in which the chastened souls of these men and women will achieve reconciliation and peace.

The second act is both swifter and sharper in its dramatic rhythm and full of definite comic and tragic notes. It is of an inimitable reality in speech and gesture which no translation can render adequately. The slowly cumulative touches by which the hopeless impossibility of Robert's position is driven home show an unerring instinct for selecting the significant detail—the detail that is of the homeliest concreteness yet of the highest illustrative value.

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The final acts are in reality but one. They show no falling off either in truth or power. But they labor under the heavy disadvantage of presenting a solution of the human problem involved in the play. And every solution is debatable. The truest stories are, after all, the stories that have no ending. Then each man can give them his own ending and every type of passion and experience is appeased. I am myself in some doubt whether Marie Weil, thoroughly as Hirschfeld convinces me of her reality, her sweetness, and her strength, could have risen to that final height of heroism. But I must hasten to add that this doubt does not spoil the play for me at all. A number of solutions are possible, since the people are not puppets but flesh and blood, since Hirschfeld stands that great test which George Moore has described in a fine passage—"the test by which Time will judge us all—the creation of a human being, of a live thing that we have met with in life before, and meet for the first time in print and who abides with us ever after." So we need but think of Hedwig, tender and deep of heart, of Robert and Marie themselves, of the tragic farce of Grete's life and fate—a very minor character, be it remembered—of Mrs. Printz and of the wonderful mother, Dora

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Frey, with her capacity for harshness and unjust anger and with her boundless love, so nobly disciplined through suffering and yet so steadily and humanly herself—we need but think of these living souls to accept *The Mothers* as one of the memorable dramas of our time.

LUDWIG LEWISOHN.

The Ohio State University,
February 21, 1916.

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LIST OF PERSONS

MRS. DORA FREY

ROBERT, HEDWIG } her children

LUDWIG FREY, her brother-in-law

MRS. MUNK

ROLF MUNK, her son

LOUISE, maid in the Frey household

MARIE WEIL

MRS. PRINTZ, her aunt

GRETE, the latter's daughter

JOSEPH, an errand boy

A PORTER

Scenes

Act I. *The garden beside the house of Mrs. Munk at Grünau near Berlin.*

Act II. *Mrs. Printz's kitchen on Skalitzer St., Berlin. Morning.*

Act III. *The living-room of the Freys in the Munk house at Grünau. Afternoon of the same day.*

Act IV. *Same as Act III. Later in the afternoon.*

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THE MOTHERS

Act 1

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ACT I

The country house of MRS. MUNK, *widow of the director of a conservatory at Grünau, near Berlin.*

A small, shaded garden that runs to the banks of the Spree River. The enclosing wall there is low, so that one has a view of the water. To the right is the bright, one-story house with its veranda. The veranda is protected by an awning and divided in half by a wooden partition, thus marking the sides of the house inhabited respectively by the FREY *and* MUNK *families. From each side of the veranda broad, easy steps lead to the garden. The railings are covered with flourishing potted plants. In the centre of the garden stands a fine chestnut tree, its leaves are autumnally tinted, it bears many prickly fruits. A round rustic table has been built about the trunk of the tree, and garden chairs surround it. From this central point narrow gravel-paths cut the lawn in all directions. The grass is ready to be mowed; wild flowers dot it. On the lawn here and there*

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withered beds of phlox. At the right, in front of the veranda, an ornamental flower-bed with a small fountain in the form of a praying boy, and rose-bushes. The twitter of birds sounds from the chestnut tree.

It is a clear evening of September, rosy with the afterglow. At the table under the tree sits HEDWIG FREY, *leaning back in a garden chair, with her hands in her lap. Between the fingers of one hand she holds a letter. The envelope has slipped down and lies on the ground beside her. She is twenty years old, full of spiritual struggle and thought. Her delicate and nervous face is pale; her eyes under the well-moulded forehead have a soft and lost expression as though she had wept much. She wears a simple mourning dress and garden shoes.*

In the house, on the side in which the MUNKS *live, some one is playing Beethoven: the second movement of the "Wedding Sonata" (Op. 90). The music floats over the garden, soft and rich.* HEDWIG *does not move. Now the music ceases and* ROLF MUNK, *a vigorous man in the thirties, steps out on the veranda. His garb is careless and betrays the artist; he leans against the railing and silently watches the girl for a while.*

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ROLF [*calls softly*]. Oh, Miss Hetty!

HEDWIG [*is startled and drops the letter*]. Yes?

ROLF. You're losing your letter.

[HEDWIG *is about to lean over.*]

ROLF [*hurrying down the steps*]. Don't you dare! [*He is about to pick it up.*]

HEDWIG [*in nervous haste*]. Never mind! Please!

ROLF [*stepping back*]. All right! Very well. I'm not curious.

[HEDWIG *doesn't answer. The letter lies on the ground. There is a pause. At last he smiles and then laughs brightly.*]

ROLF. Can't just lie there, can it? [*Swiftly he picks up the letter and envelope with the tips of his fingers and, looking rigidly the other way, presents them to her with outstretched arm.*] Your letter, young lady!

HEDWIG [*slipping the letter into her apron pocket*]. You may well laugh at me, Mr. Munk. You might really have your suspicions, mightn't you? [*Carelessly.*] Nothing of importance. Just an advertisement.

ROLF. Very good. All right. I'm not asking for an explanation. I want really to beg your pardon for having disturbed you. Want me to clear out?

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HEDWIG. But not at all. On the contrary. I was listening to you. When one hears Beethoven, it's just—just like victory.

ROLF [*with gentle humor*]. The fellow had a decided gift. May I? [*Draws a garden chair opposite her and sits down.*]

HEDWIG. Yes, stay a little while. I'm all alone to-day. Mamma has gone to Johannisthal—she's discovered one of her wonderful bargains there, a goose for Sunday.

ROLF. Another goose? Well, I won't have to eat it.

HEDWIG. Yes, you will. Your mother'll have to be so good as to take one, too.

[*A brief pause.*]

ROLF. Magnificent tree. [*He looks up.*]

HEDWIG. Yes, it's wonderful. And you should have heard the finches, Mr. Munk. They sang to your playing.

ROLF [*slaps his knee*]. Well, I'll be——

HEDWIG. What is it?

ROLF. Oh, my stupid thoughtlessness again!

HEDWIG. Why, I don't see what.

ROLF. There I sit and strum so that the house shakes.

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HEDWIG. You played beautifully.

ROLF [*looks at her. Slowly*]. But it was a bit inconsiderate—wasn't it? Your loss is so recent.

HEDWIG [*softly*]. Things pass so swiftly. But I'm not a bit ashamed. What's the purpose of crêpe and black dresses? You want to honor those whom you have lost, don't you? Or, at least, think of them more deeply. Well, that's just what your playing Beethoven helps me to do.

ROLF. Does it? That's the last straw. I don't want to remind you of your sorrow. I'll play you some blithe bit of Mozart next time.

HEDWIG. Dear Mr. Munk, it's such a good thing that you got us away from Berlin. It was truly kind.

ROLF. Come now!

HEDWIG. You needn't play hide and seek with me. I don't mean to bother you with gratitude.

ROLF. My mother let you have half of the house. Tremendous favor, wasn't it? The main thing, it seemed to me, was that you should get some real air—away from Berlin. Do you like Grünau?

HEDWIG. I can't tell you yet how much. We're here now and all the old life has suddenly become submerged—oh, I do like it. [*She rises, steps on the lawn, and busies herself at one of the beds.*]

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ROLF [*looking at her*]. Be careful, you're treading on flowers.

HEDWIG [*steps back*]. The grass should be mowed.

ROLF [*gets up*]. The only pity is that the summer is on its last legs. Never mind, we'll have a fine autumn—evenings like this, with delicate colors and the water smooth.

HEDWIG. You have so much peace here. You ought to be grateful. I had almost lost the feeling that one can get out of it all, can get close to nature. Oh, I'd like to rest now. [*A pause. She watches the river.*] But I don't believe our path toward peace will be an easy one. You know what troubles us—what we miss—[*there are tears in her voice*]—what my mother misses. [*A pause.*]

ROLF [*looks at her earnestly, shakes his head gently. He speaks with deeply felt insistence*]. Do you know, Miss Hetty, you're alone too much. Talk to your mother now. Up to this time, of course, she was under the influence of the first grief and confusion. But things have changed now. Your father is gone; you need your mother doubly now.

HEDWIG. And she needs me.

ROLF. Yes.

HEDWIG [*struggling, half turned away, after a de-*

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cision]. I'd like to ask you something, Mr. Munk. I can't talk about it to any one else. There isn't any one else in the world to whom I can mention it.

ROLF. That makes me very happy.

HEDWIG [*looks at him*]. It draws one together, doesn't it?

ROLF. I'd like to be your friend, Miss Hetty. [*He holds her hand.*]

HEDWIG. I need one now.

ROLF. You have two.

HEDWIG. You—and whom?

ROLF. Yourself.

HEDWIG [*breathing deeply*]. You're right. I really should be my own best friend.

ROLF [*quite lost in his vision of her, involuntarily*]. You're truly interesting. [HEDWIG *looks at him questioningly.*] You must understand me rightly. . . . You know how I live with my mother. Granted: the old lady is the best sort on earth. But I don't see much of her. I've got to work in Berlin —make music. You know. Well, in your father's lifetime your house was, I might say, a well-spring of interest to me. I felt things in you and your brother that had never lain in me. New things,

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Miss Hetty, new wishes. It was only the commonplace misery of the family life that wouldn't let these things flourish. It's all different now. You're alone with your mother, and life now demands of you what you've felt only darkly hitherto—independence.

HEDWIG. Yes, that is true. I never felt it so strongly before that one *can* grow.

ROLF. And isn't it a splendid feeling?

HEDWIG [*sits, bending forward, her chin in her hand*]. But one ought to be strong. . . . Or, at least, one must be able to respect one's self! Don't apply that personally, I beg of you. I didn't mean myself specially. I mean the whole of life, the conditions of one's life—and then again those whom these conditions have made what they are: the people one ought to respect.

ROLF. The people one ought to respect? I see. Yes . . . and you're beginning not to do so?

HEDWIG [*softly*]. Yes.

ROLF. Oh . . . that's—well. But your mother. She's big, isn't she?

HEDWIG [*passionately*]. Really big people are honest. They're glad to confess to a mistake. And my mother can't do that. [*Slowly.*] Yet she suffers. It's strange. She suffers unspeakably.

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ROLF. That's the element of greatness in her. And of goodness, too.

HEDWIG [*softly*]. You were there when my father died. . . . My mother was sightless and speechless in her grief: but I saw how you stood at the door, Mr. Munk. I saw in your eyes that you felt the truth: her life was a lie. The husband dies. What now? The woman has a son on whom she might lean . . . the daughter has a brother. But he's gone, cast out. . . . And where so many things have proved hollow, what veracity will be left? That's what you thought that day, Mr. Munk.

ROLF. H—m!

HEDWIG. My father was unconscious during the last days. He didn't think of the boy. But my mother . . . my mother had but the one thought: he's dying and our boy isn't here. She was brave to the last and nursed father. But then, that night, when it was all over, and we two stood by the bed alone—she looked at me and she said: "The boy." Then she broke down.

ROLF. Dear Miss Hetty, it stirs you up so——

HEDWIG. Never mind. Let me talk it all out once. From that time on she was silent and didn't

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mention anything. But often at night I saw her sit up in bed and listen for a step on the stair. And then when she was disappointed again she sank back and wept: the boy. [*A pause. She gets up.*] Until now we've just lived thoughtlessly from day to day. Now suddenly one is to be armed for great decisions. That isn't easy, you may be sure. . . . For when we begin to doubt whether we ought to love those whom we do love, or respect those whom we happen to respect—why, then everything seems empty about us and yet—full of fog. We want to breathe and can't, we want to be free, and yet struggle against freedom.

ROLF [*slowly*]. Then you have your uncle.

HEDWIG. Yes.

ROLF. He's a man, after all.

[HEDWIG *looks at him without speaking.* ROLF *is silent. A smile plays about his lips.*]

HEDWIG. My uncle wants to be a second father to me. That's what he says, and I believe he means it sincerely.

ROLF. Assuredly.

HEDWIG. You have something against uncle, Mr. Munk?

ROLF. No, he has something against me. The

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truth is, it's hard to get along with people like your uncle—he fears criticism.

HEDWIG [*clenches her fist on the table*]. Well, and that's the kind of net one is caught in. One wants to get out, to be one's self. . . . Oh, there isn't anything worse than to be in a spiritual prison. When I think it all over—he could be with us now—we could have him—here! Oh, when I think of that I shudder at what you call my mother's greatness. Tell me, Mr. Munk. You were Robert's teacher. You know the dread in which he lived. When Papa forced him into the office, he suffered frightfully. I had to be silent. I barely dared to hold his hand when he came into my room in the evening, to show him that I felt for him. I tell you, it seemed to me as though the music were throbbing in him like his very blood, as though he would bleed to death in his repressed yearning. [*She looks at him.*] He clung so to you. Did you really have faith in him?

ROLF. Certainly in his will.

HEDWIG. And for how much does the will count in an artist?

ROLF [*slowly, with momentary pallor*]. For a great deal, we must hope. We can't hope to be geniuses at once. I would have made a good pianist of him.

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HEDWIG [*with a sad and subtle smile*]. That wasn't Robert's ambition. And I believe, if you'll forgive me, that you yourself in those days didn't encourage him in such modest wishes.

[ROLF *lets his eyes rest on the ground.*]

HEDWIG. Robert never had a genuine and happy belief in himself. I think it was only a kind of longing——

ROLF [*with a gentle, bitter laugh*]. Only longing.

HEDWIG. He was so young. And then in all his stormy immaturity he was thrust into this dry, drab atmosphere. Naturally the girl seemed liberty itself. [*A silence.*]

ROLF. What did she do in the factory?

HEDWIG. She was a finisher—polished the silverware. It's said to be very exhausting work. You have to stand all day in the hot, bad air pressed against a board. Robert often described her to me.

ROLF. No doubt, no doubt.

HEDWIG [*looks at him*]. She must be charming, Mr. Munk. Without an understanding for his inner conflicts, of course—you couldn't expect that of a woman of her origin. But he could tell her everything——

ROLF. Abuse and damn everything to her—yes.

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HEDWIG. And she loved him so.

ROLF. I never doubted that. But your brother! Was it really love on his side, or only defiance and anger and the desire for freedom?

HEDWIG. I confess I never understood Robert's feelings—that the girl could suffice him, I mean. But I don't know. Did you ever hear how it all began?

ROLF. Began? No.

HEDWIG. One evening in November when my brother was alone in the shop with the girl, she declared her love to him.

ROLF. Well! H—m! That's characteristic.

HEDWIG. Of Robert. Isn't it?

ROLF. Hardly. Of the girl.

[HEDWIG *is silent.*]

ROLF. How long has he been gone?

HEDWIG. Two years this Christmas.

ROLF. And you didn't hear from him? Ever? Where is he? What has become of the girl?

HEDWIG [*softly*]. I suppose he's in Berlin with her. I should have stayed with him!—in spite of everything. But I was afraid of him when he went away alone and seemed to want no one but the girl. [*A pause.*] He has been terribly sinned against.

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ROLF. You believe that. [*He rises, walks up and down, then stands before her and speaks thoughtfully.*] What do you think, Miss Hetty? Does Robert know that his father is dead?

HEDWIG [*softly*]. That's the horrible part of it. He got the news from a dirty newspaper. There lies a deep injury in that.

ROLF [*rather suddenly*]. But what makes you think that he read the notice?

HEDWIG [*confused*]. Oh—it's so easily possible. It's two weeks ago—— [*Bursting out*]: Oh, I'd like to confide in you!

ROLF [*steps up to her*]. You know something definite?

HEDWIG [*leans her head against her arm and cries softly. A pause*]. He wrote to me.

ROLF. Good Lord! He did, eh?

HEDWIG. For four days I've been dragging the letter about with me. The porter—Joseph who used to work for us, you remember him—he's very homely, and limps, but such a good boy. Father put him out because he stood up for Robert. Well, Robert sent him with the letter. Fortunately I got hold of it. There it is! [*She takes the letter from her pocket and leans back in the chair.*]

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ROLF [*confused*]. But Miss Hetty! Now you must——

HEDWIG [*with fluttering breath*]. I'm so glad, so glad that I can tell somebody. I'll read it to you, though I almost know it by heart. [*She opens the letter and reads*]: "Dear Hetty: I'll be brief. Papa is dead. I read it in the paper." [*She stops.*]

ROLF. Don't let it hurt so. Go on.

HEDWIG [*reads*]: "I can forgive you that I was so brutally treated. I know who rules in our house. And yet it stirred me up to know that Papa is gone. I am happy with my dear girl. My health is wretched. Don't tell any one of this letter. Not even Mamma. I was calm until now. You people stole my strength. And I have such longing. Answer me, if you care to. Your Robert." [*A pause.*] If I care to——

ROLF [*takes the letter from her hand, reads it hastily once more. Then he speaks reflectively*]. Longing. Do you know what impression I get from this?

HEDWIG. Well?

ROLF. That he wants—some avenue of approach——

HEDWIG [*looks up with glowing cheeks*]. Do you really think!

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ROLF [*vivaciously*]. Why else should he write? The death of his father—that's what shook him up! Miss Hetty, I'd like to go to him——

HEDWIG [*takes his hand in both of hers*]. Oh, would you?

ROLF. He can't do anything worse than kick me out. I don't believe we'd be making a mistake. Good Lord! how that brings back everything! And what a good fellow he is!

HEDWIG. Oh, I'm so happy that you feel so.

[ROLF *keeps her hand in his. A pause.*]

HEDWIG. But the girl. He does seem to cling to her.

ROLF. We can't tell about that. With his human affections he clings to her, no doubt. As a man and an artist, he's going to the dogs with her. I feel it all. That's his conflict.

HEDWIG [*deeply shaken*]. My poor boy—[*then softly and with deep sincerity*]—and the poor girl.

ROLF. It's just an attempt we're making, of course. We must realize that. I can't drag him here. But I'll talk to him. Don't answer him at all. To-morrow is Sunday. In the forenoon I'll go in to Berlin. Where is the letter? Where does he live?

HEDWIG [*blushing*]. In the house with the girl.

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[*Looks at the letter.*] With a Mrs. Printz—Skalitzer Street——

ROLF [*note-book in hand*]. What number?

HEDWIG. 134. [*Looks up.*] But what are you going to say to him?

ROLF. Well, I must see first of all—[*with quick embarrassment*]—how he lives there and—well, what sort the girl is.

HEDWIG [*suddenly*]. If she could keep him, and we have him, too.

ROLF [*looks deep into her eyes*]. Ah, that would be like a new day. If we can just get him here!

[HEDWIG *laughs and weeps.*]

ROLF. But you'll have to show your mother the letter now. Absolutely.

HEDWIG. Good heavens!

ROLF. It'll make her young again.

HEDWIG. But my uncle——

ROLF. We'll tame him. If only your mother is willing.

HEDWIG. And if I have you! You'll help.

ROLF. We'll manage, my dear, we'll manage.

LOUISE [*appears on the veranda. Her voice is screechy*]. Miss Hetty!

HEDWIG. Oh! Why, what time is it, Mr.

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Munk? I must go to the kitchen. If Mamma comes——

ROLF. Be calm now. [*He looks at his watch.*] It's only seven.

HEDWIG. That late? I must hurry in. Well, then—— [*Takes his hand in silence.*]

LOUISE. Miss Hetty, you was goin' to get the chops ready.

HEDWIG. Yes, yes, I'm coming now. [LOUISE *goes into the house. To* ROLF.] Well, then——

ROLF. It's all arranged. We'll face it out.

HEDWIG. Yes. Thank you. [*She walks up the steps, crosses the veranda, and enters the house.* LOUISE *follows her.*]

[ROLF *alone. He looks after her as though the vision of her had not left his eyes. There is a pause. Then his mother, old* MRS. MUNK, *appears on the veranda. She is over seventy —a small, bent old lady, her wrinkled face as well as her gestures and speech show an amusing resemblance to those of her son. She looks about searchingly with her near-sighted eyes.*]

ROLF [*pulling himself together*]. Right here, Mother! I'm down here.

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MRS. MUNK. Good heavens, Robert! I've been looking for you this half-hour. You were going to give me the Elsners' address. The letter ought to be posted to-day.

ROLF. I've told you often, Mother: there's always time until seven.

MRS. MUNK. No, no, no, no! You always say there's an evening train that takes the letters, but afterward I find that there isn't. I can't find my glasses, either. One is quite lost. I look and look. You've probably hidden them among your music.

ROLF. You're always looking for something. Give me the letter; I'll post it.

MRS. MUNK [*comes down into the garden, step by step*]. But don't forget it. The other day when I wrote to congratulate Aunt Clara on her seventieth birthday, I found the letter a week later in your overcoat pocket—all soiled from your cigars. Wasn't Hetty Frey here just now?

ROLF [*absent-mindedly and a bit morosely*]. Yes, this minute. [*He gives her his arm and escorts her to the tree. She sits down.*]

MRS. MUNK. So! Yes, one can still sit here quite comfortably. [*Looks at him.*] Don't you think, too, that Hetty Frey is a remarkably fine

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girl? Or have you the contrary opinion, as usual?

ROLF [*warmly*]. No, Mother. Not in the least.

MRS. MUNK [*observes him*]. Well——

ROLF. She impresses me. Do you know, Mother, the world is poor in earnest—children . . . people who have suffered and yet preserved the child-likeness of their hearts. That's what she has done, and I find that impressive.

MRS. MUNK. Impressive! That's what her mother was, too. That's not enough, not much even. One ought to be good first of all. Good and clever. The rest'll be added unto you.

ROLF. But that's just what Hetty—what Hedwig Frey is. And you don't really mean to say anything against her mother, either.

MRS. MUNK. No, no, and I'm not doing it. But I respect the woman too highly not to reproach her when it's just. She doesn't know how to bring up children.

ROLF. Oh, Mother, you have such abstract views in that respect.

MRS. MUNK. That's much better than to commit follies and then have to worry along with the consequences all your life. She may well thank

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God that her daughter has turned out as she has. Hetty is womanly. That's what helps a woman, whatever life may bring, and that's what you admire in her, too.

[*At the garden gate to the left appears* LUDWIG FREY.]

ROLF [*softly*]. H—m! Well, there he comes, the dear uncle.

MRS. MUNK [*looks around*]. What? Well, your taste——

ROLF. But, Mother——

[LUDWIG FREY *in hat and overcoat with signs of mourning. A small corpulent man in the fifties. Red, nervous face, moustache with signs of being gnawed at, grayish hair. He is having an altercation with a porter who is carrying a large bundle for him. They both enter by the garden gate at the left.*]

FREY. I'm not interested in all that. I never paid more for a morning's work. There's your money. Now don't bother me any more.

THE PORTER. But you gotta take the delay into account, sir. Time is money.

FREY. Delay! Nonsense! I don't care about

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the few pennies, but—— You won't get more than you have a right to. Good-bye.

THE PORTER. Aw, you needn't git excited. [*He goes, banging the gate behind him.*]

FREY [*stands there holding his bundles*]. Good evening, Mrs. Munk. Beg pardon, but I can't remove my hat. [*To* ROLF *carelessly.*] 'Evening.

ROLF [*amiably*]. How do you do, Mr. Frey. May I relieve you?

FREY. No, no, thank you. Never mind. I'll put it on the table. [*He does so.*]

MRS. MUNK. You oughtn't to excite yourself, Mr. Frey.

FREY. Oh, I know, and I beg your pardon, Mrs. Munk. It's only the impudence of those fellows. It's sheer robbery. You know I don't mind giving a poor man a tip, but I'd really rather wear myself out and pull and drag my packages home alone. [*To* ROLF.] Oh, yes, you may smile, you great artist. You just ought to be in my skin for a day or so. [*A pause.*] Well, how's everything? How's art?

ROLF. Art is always perfect. The question is: how's the poor devil of an artist?

FREY. Well, you with your genius, what are you composing now, if one may ask?

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ROLF. Of course you may. Funeral marches and waltzes of yearning. That's as far as I ever get.

FREY. Funeral waltzes and marches of yearning?

ROLF [*dryly*]. Witty!

FREY. What?

ROLF. Exactly.

FREY. Aha! What do you mourn over, anyhow?

ROLF. The justice of nature.

FREY. And what do you yearn after?

ROLF. My supper. [*To* MRS. MUNK.] Isn't it almost ready, Mother?

MRS. MUNK. Yes. Have a little patience. We have a warm supper to-day.

FREY. But is my sister-in-law at home? Maybe you know.

MRS. MUNK. No, so far as I know Mrs. Frey went to Johannisthal.

FREY [*brutally*]. They have a great deal to do. This eternal gadding about.

MRS. MUNK [*carefully ignoring his attitude*]. She must have come with the same train as yourself.

FREY [*mounts the lowest veranda steps*]. Hetty! Hetty!

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HEDWIG [*appears on the veranda in her kitchen apron*]. Good evening, uncle. Good evening, Mrs. Munk.

MRS. MUNK [*cheerfully*]. 'Evening, little cook! Well, are you very busy? Don't let anything burn.

ROLF. She won't, you may be sure.

FREY. Can't we eat in the garden this evening?

HEDWIG. No, uncle, I'm afraid it's too chilly.

FREY. Very well. Go ahead then. [HEDWIG *goes in.*] This travelling back and forth every day takes it out of one. I must try to get a little rest, a little inner rest, too. These last months have sapped my strength to such an extent——

MRS. MUNK. That's true of your sister-in-law, too. I don't like the way she looks at all.

FREY. Oh, well, my sister-in-law! She sits out here—she doesn't see or hear anything of the real worries. But I—it's a tradition in our family, you know: I always get the worst of any situation. That's my privilege.

MRS. DORA FREY [*comes swiftly from the left through the garden gate. She is near fifty. Vigorous in appearance and carriage. Her hair has turned quite gray; her features are still youthful although sharply cut, nervous, and impassioned. She is dressed in*

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simple mourning. She carries a marketing bag and is hot from her trip]. Good evening, everybody.

FREY. There you are at last, Dora.

MRS. FREY. Why at last? If I run on foot I wouldn't get here any sooner. Mrs. Munk, I have something for you. Look at this fellow here—over eight pounds. [*She pulls a goose out of the bag.*]

ROLF. The poor goose.

MRS. FREY. When you eat it you won't pity it so much. Well, what do you say? Wasn't it worth while? And at the price I got it!

MRS. MUNK [*touching the goose*]. Splendid, oh, yes.

MRS. FREY. It'll give a tureen full of grease.

ROLF. More than I would.

MRS. FREY. But—do you want one?

MRS. MUNK. This one, do you mean, Mrs. Frey?

MRS. FREY. Heavens, no. I'll keep this one.

FREY [*vivaciously*]. Well, which one, then?

MRS. FREY. I took two. You don't get such a chance often. Look here: exactly the same as the other. I thought of you at once, and—[*to* ROLF]—of you!

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FREY [*nervously*]. But, my dear Dora, suppose Mrs. Munk has no use for one?

MRS. FREY. You don't understand that. One must take advantage of the opportunity.

MRS. MUNK. Certainly. I'll take it; and I'm very much obliged. [*She lifts the other goose out of the bag.*]

ROLF. Reminds one of the geese in the Capitol.

MRS. FREY [*calls*]. Hedwig! Hetty!

HEDWIG [*appears on the veranda*]. Yes, Mamma! Good evening.

MRS. FREY. 'Evening, Hetty. Is supper ready?

HEDWIG. In a moment. Was your shopping satisfactory?

MRS. FREY. Just look at this . . .

FREY [*nervously*]. Please, please! You can admire all that later.

MRS. FREY. Admire it, oh, yes. The eating is the easiest part.

FREY. There's something I must talk over with you, Dora.

MRS. FREY. After supper, eh?

FREY. No, please, at once.

MRS. FREY. Good heavens!

FREY [*embarrassed and angry*]. If you please——!

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MRS. MUNK. Come on, Rolf. I'm really hungry. Don't let us disturb you, please.

[ROLF *takes the goose, offers his arm to his mother, and escorts her into the house.* HEDWIG *turns to go, too.*]

MRS. FREY. Just leave the chops on the stove, Hetty. We'll come in in a minute.

FREY. It'll take longer than that.

MRS. FREY. Oh, very well. [*She calls after the* MUNKS.] I wish you a good appetite.

MRS. MUNK. Thank you. The same to you.

[MRS. MUNK, ROLF, *and* HEDWIG *all disappear in the house.*]

MRS. FREY. Well, what's the matter? Is it some misfortune?

FREY. Wait and see. [*He takes a paper with an official seal out of his pocket.*]

MRS. FREY. I thought so. Another one of those miserable papers. Do whatever you like, Ludwig, but spare me all the legal rot about the estate.

FREY. But that's exactly what I can't spare you. And I must insist, please, both on more moderate expressions and on your attention. [*Lowering his voice.*] And I don't like your intimacy with these strange people in the least.

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MRS. FREY. Oh, they annoy you, do they? You'd better be glad that we don't annoy them.

FREY. Annoy? Don't understand. Don't I pay my rent?

MRS. FREY [*also lowering her voice*]. You know very well that Mrs. Munk did it out of friendship. It's important, naturally, that Hedwig doesn't grow quite stale and embittered. Here she has Rolf and the old lady—two really interesting people. A girl of her age needs some stimulus for her imagination.

FREY. You don't say! Well, this Munk has too much imagination. But to get down to brass tacks. I saw our attorney at noon and he gave me the will.

MRS. FREY. Did you have to go for it? Couldn't the man send it?

FREY. I wanted to get the matter settled. Now listen. Your husband, as you know, made this will about ten years ago.

MRS. FREY. The time he had pneumonia, yes.

FREY. And according to this will you are the sole heir.

MRS. FREY. Sole heir? How that sounds!

FREY. My dear Dora, you have less reason than most people for despising money.

MRS. FREY. What do you mean? At present

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the money is invested in your business. Very well. It's for me to decide what is to be done later on. Isn't that so?

FREY. That's so. Quite right.

MRS. FREY. Very well. I will decide then.

FREY. What I want to call to your attention is this: Hedwig's chances in life, as things are nowadays, depend entirely on her dowry. If you were to divide the money, you'd be robbing her of those chances. The capital is too small to be divided.

MRS. FREY [*disquieted*]. What are you aiming at? There's the will. Everything must be done as Leopold desired.

FREY. He didn't desire certain consequences. You'll have to make a will yourself. Matters stand quite differently from the way they did ten years ago. There arises the question of the second—bodily heir.

MRS. FREY [*calmly*]. Who's that?

FREY. Why—why, the fellow—you know!

MRS. FREY. What fellow?

FREY. Why, good gracious! I mean the son, naturally. [*He looks at her in suspense, as though expecting to be attacked.*]

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MRS. FREY [*firmly*]. You mean Robert, don't you? Well, then, say so, for heaven's sake.

FREY. Very well. Robert, then. As you please.

MRS. FREY. That's his name, isn't it?

FREY [*sharply*]. But not Frey, if you please.

MRS. FREY. Oh, yes. His name is Frey, as his father's was before him.

FREY. His father is dead. It's a question of the name of the family.

MRS. FREY. Rot!

FREY [*controlling himself*]. Well—I don't want to excite myself any further. I merely ask you, for Hedwig's sake: Are you going to let this fellow, who was driven from his father's house, be one of your heirs, and ruin the future of your only child?

MRS. FREY. Never mind those phrases, please. Give me time.

FREY. It would be contrary to all proper feeling.

MRS. FREY [*looks coldly into his eyes*]. And contrary to your calculations, eh?

FREY [*in violent anger*]. Dora! [*A pause. He is deeply excited but forces himself to speak softly.*] Of course. This vulgar suspicion. But one must practise restraint and do one's duty calmly. I ought to remember that I'm dealing with women.

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MRS. FREY. If you realize that, act accordingly.

FREY. You see. Let's be quite frank and understand each other. I'm a fool. I've been one all my life. Dora, when your husband died, the business was all but ruined. His carelessness and your endless extravagance. Don't contradict me. Just consider what would have become of you. Your husband didn't count. The trouble with the boy had broken him. Without energy or efficiency, he would have let things slide along, and you people might have starved if I hadn't come. Well, but how did your shiftlessness concern me? I had my excellent business in Magdeburg: I didn't have to become responsible for a shaky concern. But because our credit and our good name were endangered, I gave up everything, everything, to save you.

MRS. FREY. And I am very——

FREY. Grateful, I know. What do you call being grateful? Instead of thanking me for ridding you of that scamp, you've made me responsible for the whole thing.

MRS. FREY [*pale and speaking softly*]. You are responsible, Ludwig.

FREY. Oh, yes. That's too good for anything! Had you people grown imbecile? The boy was

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rotten to the core with laziness and rebelliousness and sensuality. Of course, you took his part. You even felt flattered—very talented, the boy. [*Lowering his voice.*] You even kept that Mr. Munk in the house, that scoundrel who incites children against their own parents. But, of course, when all his fine doings came to the light—young Frey at the theatre and on the street with a factory girl, with the vilest wench in Berlin, and when the boy treated his own father brutally—then you were all beside yourselves and I had to come—and had to tell you what was your duty, what was the least you could do.

MRS. FREY. Yet, it was you, you!

FREY. Yes, damn it all! And I suffered most under it all. You deserved no pity. This evil seed of opposition is in your children. Look out for Hedwig, I tell you. Don't let her be too much with this fellow, this music teacher! We work for our children, we live for our children—the least we have a right to expect is a little love, that the children love one a little.

MRS. FREY [*softly and shaken*]. The boy loves me.

FREY. But what's to be expected if a raw boy is taught by his mother that the father is criminally

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careless, and by his father that he needn't take the mother seriously? A true child that has real filial love will stand by its parents in a time of stress, will give up its own happiness to serve them. I'm afraid I've—given mine to serve you. [*He presses his hand to his eyes.*]

MRS. FREY. Ludwig, I know that you've undertaken a heavy responsibility. You made the business prosperous again and, of course, you had a right to. But you see, Ludwig, you did persuade us to put the boy out.

FREY. Persuaded you? Of course. God knows I wish you no evil, Dora—but I wish you might be forced to see the boy in the gutter he loves. What did he care about his mother? He had the factory wench!

MRS. FREY [*moaning*]. Ludwig, I tell you, don't provoke me. You insult this body that bore him, my very heart. [*She weeps.*]

[HEDWIG *appears, unnoticed, on the veranda and remains standing there.*]

FREY. Dora!

MRS. FREY. The boy is my curse. But can you blame me for loving him? [*Her words are now a confession of her deepest self.*] I've buried so much hope.

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He *was* good. His terrible ingratitude enraged me, I know; but only for a moment. Our heart was set on our boy. You tore us apart. I summoned you, Ludwig, but you did nothing to help us—to make the boy stay! You stirred up more hatred. And now I've lost him.

FREY. And now you feel remorseful.

MRS. FREY [*passionately*]. Yes, Ludwig. I have repented. [*Louder*]: Oh, I have repented. For I know now what is eternal is this: I have lost my child. I should have called him to me—it's not the woman that holds him back any longer, but he's hurt to the very heart. I feel it. And from the very fact that he is so hurt I can see that I have lost him.

HEDWIG [*unable to contain herself any longer, comes down into the garden and cries in deepest emotion*]: Mamma!

MRS. FREY [*startled*]. Hetty—you look like a ghost——

HEDWIG. I was thinking of Robert——

MRS. FREY. You——

HEDWIG. Don't look at me that way, Mamma!

MRS. FREY. Hetty——

HEDWIG. I—must—— [*She slips into her mother's arms. The letter drops from her hand.*]

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MRS. FREY. A letter?

HEDWIG. From Robert!

MRS. FREY [*crying out*]. Robert?

HEDWIG [*clings to her*]. Be calm, Mamma, for heaven's sake, be calm. I believe he wants to come back to us.

MRS. FREY. Robert——

HEDWIG. Yes, yes! Oh, Mamma, Mamma!

MRS. FREY. Give me the letter.

HEDWIG. Let me read it to you.

MRS. FREY. Give me the letter. [*Snatches it.*] He wrote to you?

HEDWIG [*softly*]. I suppose he didn't want to——

[MRS. FREY *begins to read breathlessly. Then she stops and, ghastly pale, stares at the paper.*]

HEDWIG. Oh, Mamma—don't read any further.

MRS. FREY. Be still. [*She reads to the end of the letter. Then she sinks powerless into a chair and weeps.*]

[HEDWIG *kneels down beside her. A pause.*]

FREY [*who has hitherto stood by in silence, approaches* MRS. FREY, *takes the letter from her, reads it, laughs a forced laugh, crumples the paper and throws it aside*]. The boy has a pretty gift for acting!

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MRS. FREY [*jumping up*]. Ludwig!

[FREY *draws back from her involuntarily. A pause.*]

MRS. FREY [*to* HEDWIG]. When did you get the letter?

HEDWIG [*trembling*]. Wednesday morning. Joseph brought it——

MRS. FREY. Why didn't you show it to me at once? [*A pause.* HEDWIG *is silent and looks down. Then she raises her eyes with a beseeching glance at her mother, who strokes the girl's hair and says softly*]: You foolish child.

HEDWIG. It was wrong in me. I didn't want to excite you. Rolf Munk used to be Robert's friend. So I told him. Don't be angry, Mamma. He's going to see Robert to-morrow. He believes it'll all turn out right yet.

MRS FREY. Does he have to poke his nose into everything? [*Tenderly.*] Hetty, darling, you must have suffered.

HEDWIG. Oh, only a little, dear Mamma. [*She keeps her arms about her mother.*]

FREY [*beside himself, almost unable to find words*]. What? And what does this fellow undertake to do? And are you going to humiliate your-

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self and give in and have the boy begged to return?

MRS. FREY [*clearly and calmly*]. If he wants to—yes.

FREY. And I declare to you, Dora, that so long as I am in the house——

MRS. FREY. I can't be ruled by you any longer, Ludwig.

FREY. And the woman. Do you suppose that he'll give her up—for his mother's sake? [*He laughs.*]

MRS. FREY [*slowly*]. If he comes—he has given her up.

HEDWIG [*leaning against her mother's bosom*]. Dear Mamma—if Robert can't do that——

MRS. FREY. Then he will not come, Hedwig.

Curtain

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ACT II

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ACT II

Berlin. At MRS. PRINTZ'S *on Skalitzer Street. The workroom of* MARIE WEIL, *which is also the family kitchen. Small, low-ceiled, but bright. In the background an open window which shows only a patch of morning sky as in a frame. The flat is on the fourth floor. Under the window stands the work table, square, rough, scratched by the burnishers. On it the tools of the silver-burnisher: burnishers, brushes, ammonia bottles, mugs of suds. A kerosene lamp stands on the table, and about it three-legged working stools. In the background to the left a cooking stove. In the right corner an iron folding-bed, now open, and a kitchen cupboard. One door to the left leads to the hall, another into the bedroom of the* PRINTZ *family. Over the door to the left a small clock; over that to the right a little picture of Richard Wagner. On the window ledge a small bird cage.*

It is about eight o'clock. A bright, cool Sunday morn-

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ing. MARIE WEIL *sits bent over the table and burnishes silver. A heap of cheap, unpolished knives lies before her. She works with mechanical rapidity and throws the burnished knives into a box filled with sawdust that stands under the table.* MARIE *is twenty-four years old, muscular, brunette: her thick hair comes low over her forehead. Her narrow nose is moulded with uncommon delicacy. Her heavy eyebrows make her appear harder and more determined than she really is. She is very pale, nervous, and worn out. Her eyes are dark, with blue circles around them. In them there is an expression of spiritual maturity. Her lips are full and slightly chapped. She wears her working dress and thick felt slippers on her feet. Her sleeves are rolled up, showing her reddened arms.*

Outside, far below in the yard, sounds the muffled playing of a hurdy-gurdy.

MARIE [*stops work and counts the knives that are still to be burnished*]. Six—eight—ten—— [*Breathes a soft sigh of exhaustion.*] H—m! [*A pause. Outside the chimes of a faraway church strike eight. She stretches herself and presses her hands to her eyes.*] Oh, dearie, dear! [*Yawns and closes her eyes. A pause.*]

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GRETE PRINTZ [*a lean, unhealthy creature of eighteen, with the physiognomy of a prostitute, coquettishly curled bangs and waxen complexion. She wears a white morning jacket. She is slightly deformed. She drags herself in from the left. Morosely*]. Mornin'.

MARIE [*usually speaks in a low, exhausted voice. Her vivacities are the more noticeable*]. Mornin'. Thought you were dead!

GRETE. If nobody don't wake you! I overslept. [*Yawns.*] Gee! but I'm tired! Well, are you through with the knives? [*She sits down opposite* MARIE *at the table.*]

MARIE [*pushes the unburnished knives over to her*]. Ten left. The others are in the box.

GRETE [*yawns*]. Scrape the cement——

MARIE. That's done. [*Works.*]

GRETE [*gets up again and goes to the window*]. Fine air. Fine air. [*She leans out and then turns back to the room*]:

"Well, then, let's go off again,
Let's go off again,
Ma-a-ry-ing!"

[*She yawns. So does* MARIE. *Both laugh.*] Look here, you must be good an' tired. How long ha'

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you been sittin' here? Why, the lamp's all warm yet. [*She feels the globe of the lamp.*]

MARIE. Since four or five. [*She works.*] Do take care o' the blades. You always drag 'em into the wet. Afterward they're all rust, and Steiner deducts for every knife.

[*They work silently.*]

MARIE [*suddenly looks out of the window. Full of yearning*]. To-day is Sunday, eh?

GRETE. Funny you know that much. Child, you better lay down an' sleep. You can hardly hold your eyes open.

MARIE [*with haste*]. Hurry now! Hurry! Joseph'll be here in a minute.

GRETE. Then he'll wait. Beast! [*Hums the tune the hurdy-gurdy is playing.*] Look here! it's warm to-day. I'm goin' to put on my light dress.

MARIE. Where are you goin' to-day?

GRETE. Halensee. Dance hall.

MARIE. As late as this?

GRETE. Aha! I wanta make somebody mad. [*She laughs.*] It's an awful good joke, you know. Joseph is out there every Sunday, too——

MARIE. Joseph? Does he dance?

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GRETE. I should say! A lame rooster ain't nothin' compared to him.

MARIE. So he dances?

GRETE. I'm tellin' you. An' he was set on dancin' with me. But 'cause I didn't want to dance with a cripple like him, I just up an' told him so right out before all the people! I wanted to get good and rid of him. An' then I kind o' flirted with Fenchel, the druggist, you know, an' he came—an' so we waltzed. Fine, I tell you! Joseph just fair turned green and yeller. You know, I just hate that feller! [*Passionately.*] You can't notice nothin' about my shoulder, can you? You don't notice nothin' when I got my corsets on?

MARIE. No.

GRETE. But that's just what makes me so awful mad. When Joseph comes here in the mornin' to get the knives, he always sits down so's he c'n look at my back. An' he told that Lina in Halensee about it—I know he did. An' o' course, she told the others! The low-lived——

MARIE. He's not responsible for his leg, either.

[GRETE *in a sudden access of rage throws her burnisher on the knives.*]

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MARIE. Look out! [*She strikes* GRETE'S *hand.*] Crazy, aren't you?

[GRETE *does not answer, flushes dark red and works hastily.*]

MRS. PRINTZ [*enters from the right. A woman toward the end of the sixties. Ailing, overworked, poorly clad, thin gray hair, horn-rimmed spectacles. She brings in the coffee-cups, walking softly on felt pattens*]. Mornin', children.

MARIE. Mornin', Auntie.

GRETE [*grunts*]. Morn'n.

MRS. PRINTZ [*goes to the window*]. Eh, birdie? [*Gives the bird fresh water.*] Peep, peep, little bird! There's your water—there—there!

MARIE [*exerting herself to vivacity*]. It's fine out to-day Auntie, eh?

MRS. PRINTZ. That so? Well, I dunno. I'll stay at home.

MARIE. But why, Auntie? You ought to come out an' get some air. It'll do you so much good. It'll be warm to-day. Robert'll take me up to the river to-day. Be nice, Auntie, an' come along.

MRS. PRINTZ. No, no. Let me stay where I am, child. I ain't no more good for this world. All night I had that weight on my chest again. You

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people just go. You're young. An ol' woman like me ain't nothin' but a burden.

MARIE. You don't realize how considerate Robert is.

MRS. PRINTZ. All right, my child. I'm willin' to believe it. But, if you don't mind, I always made it a kind o' principle never to be a burden to nobody. If this generation c'n do it—all right. I'm from a different time. I never could.

MARIE [*excitedly*]. Oh! Don't talk so, Auntie! You needn't be so out an' out. I understand what you mean.

MRS. PRINTZ. What's the matter now?

MARIE [*passionately*]. We're not a burden to any one. For whom I earn money—that's my lookout.

MRS. PRINTZ. Things can't go on this way. If you ain't got any sense, I'll have to speak seriously to Robert. I c'n see that you're makin' yourself sick.

MARIE. Oh, it's just for a while. It's the season at Steiner's now. An' I've got to do it all alone. Grete stays in bed till eight o'clock——

GRETE. I suppose you want me to take an example by your intended?

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MRS. PRINTZ [*to* MARIE]. Yes, my child. What Grete says there—there's some truth to it. It's awful to see it—a husky young feller like that, an' he lazies about all day with hard-workin' people. Well, that ain't right.

MARIE. That's not the way it is. You don't understand it. When he goes about all quiet an' don't do anything, he's workin' away at his ideas.

GRETE. You see, Mother. That's exactly the way it is with me.

MRS. PRINTZ. No, child. You can't tell that to an ol' woman like me. I don't know much, but I know all right that a musician has got to study. Six years ago I had a man that was member of a band livin' with me. He played the cornet. He studied, I tell you, an' he blew that thing all day, an' he wasn't even an educated man. But that's Robert's misfortune. He walks aroun' and he wants to do somethin', and keeps on wantin'—an' he'll never amount to nothin'!

MARIE. Nonsense! It's entirely different. Robert *makes* the music.

MRS. PRINTZ. Naw, he don't make none. That's the trouble. Now wasn't it friendly of Krüger, who don't know him from Adam, to let him come to his

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restaurant in the mornin' an' play the piano all he wants to? But does Robert take advantage o' that? Naw! That's his dirty pride—just like his father.

MARIE [*with an access of hate*]. Oh, that's *too* funny! No, really, Auntie, Robert don't take after the old man that much!

MRS. PRINTZ. Wait an' see! I knew Leopold Frey when he wasn't even in business for himself yet. When he an' his wife was a bridal couple. I used to see 'em goin' to the Jewish church. Fine-lookin' couple, too. She was tall an' had somethin' proud about her, too. That's thirty years ago. But I know it as if it was to-day.

MARIE. Oh! Robert was a different kind from the start. How can we get along if everybody is to be responsible for where he came from? You ought to be proud that we got him here. You haven't any notion how an artist like that has to torment and worry himself. I know that he does. If only he gets somethin' finished, then he'll have the better of all of us. He told me so himself. If he succeeds, what I earn'll be nothin' to that. Only we mustn't worry him.

[*The bell rings.*]

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MRS. PRINTZ [*with a deep sigh*]. O Lord, yes! Open the door, Grete. I'll be gettin' the coffee.

[GRETE *goes out at the left.*

MRS. PRINTZ [*goes to the stove*]. How many dozen have you got, anyhow?

MARIE. Fifty in all. But he came for the forty before.

MRS. PRINTZ [*busy with the coffee*]. Did you get paid yesterday?

MARIE. Yes.

MRS. PRINTZ. How much?

MARIE. Twenty-two seventy-five.

MRS. PRINTZ. That ain't bad.

MARIE. No, is it?

[GRETE *reënters. Behind her the apprentice* JOSEPH, *seventeen years old, tall, awkward, dragging his right leg. When he comes in and moves about in the room, he always knocks against something. He wears a black Sunday suit, a gay tie, a standing collar with wings, a stiff round hat with a straight brim on his carefully greased hair, and has a large covered basket on his arm.*]

JOSEPH. Mornin'. [*Takes off his hat and knocks with his basket against* MRS. PRINTZ.]

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MRS. PRINTZ. Slow there! Go slow!

JOSEPH. Oh! [*He grins.*] I didn't see—— [*Very loud*]: Good mornin', Mrs. Printz. [*He puts his hat on the table.*]

MARIE. No, no, I can't have a hat here.

GRETE. You must put that tile o' yours in the window.

JOSEPH. All right. [*He limps to the window. To the bird*]: Hullo there! D'you keep singin'? Chk! Chk!

GRETE. Now he thinks the bird is a hen.

[JOSEPH *grins in embarrassment.*]

MARIE. You might just as well sit down a bit, Joseph. Take 'em out of the sawdust, Grete, and get paper to wrap 'em. Hurry!

JOSEPH. I got a cloth in my basket to wrap 'em up in. [*He takes it out.*]

GRETE. So you didn't forget it for onct?

[JOSEPH *sits down and spreads the cloth on his knees.* GRETE *kneels down and frees the knives from the sawdust, handing them to* JOSEPH. *The latter rubs off each blade with a leather rag and wraps the knives in the cloth.*]

JOSEPH. No clamps that ha' come off?

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GRETE. No, there ain't none. You just tell your Mister Steiner to have the silver rolled a little thicker an' none wouldn't ever come off.

MRS. PRINTZ. Joseph, you'll drink a cup of coffee with me?

JOSEPH [*grins and nods*]. If you don't mind.

MARIE. You're fine, Joseph, aren't you? I suppose you got all that when you were at Frey's? Better times, eh?

MRS. PRINTZ [*at the stove*]. An' how do you like it at Steiner's? Do them people really do a better business?

JOSEPH. Oh, yes, they all say so!

MARIE. Oh, those Frey people are done for, anyhow, Auntie. I'm glad that I work at home now, Auntie. This old man Frey, he's a dangerous customer. If a girl—wants to, she can have a fine time with him. Well, I didn't want to. An' he hates me to the bone. [*She laughs.*] It's mutual, anyhow.

[*A pause.*]

MRS. PRINTZ. Oh, I dunno, children—them Steiners where you work now, Joseph—I can't say as I like them people, either, when I see how Joseph has to hustle about all day. Here's Sunday, too!

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That oughtn't to be allowed. How do you stand it, Joseph, with that foot o' yours?

JOSEPH [*blushing, with a shy glance at* GRETE]. Oh, yes. That's all right.

GRETE. If a feller c'n dance with girls in the afternoon, all fine an' elegant.

[JOSEPH *turns pale and smiles.*]

MRS. PRINTZ [*who has had her back turned to the others*]. Oh, Grete, I sewed your corset again. I guess it'll be all right now.

[GRETE *jumps up suddenly, goes out, and slams the door behind her.*]

MRS. PRINTZ. Well! What's the matter with her?

[*A pause.*]

ROBERT FREY [*enters from the left. He is twenty-two years old. His face is nervous and thought-worn. His hair is dark, his eyes blue and dreamy. His garb is a bit shabby*]. Morning! Maisie, I've broken with that fellow definitely.

MARIE. What is it, sweetheart? [*She rises wearily. He touches her forehead with his lips.*]

ROBERT. I'll tell you presently. Good morning, Mrs. Printz; good morning, Joseph. [*Shakes hands with both hastily.*] His impudence got to be too much

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for me. A fellow like that, a shabby innkeeper—— And those women, anyhow, they always stand around and lean against the piano when I play and grin at me. That won't do. I can't bear that.

MARIE. Did you have any special quarrel with Krüger?

ROBERT. Oh, not at all. Only I won't take anything from a fellow like that. He wants to use me as a piano-player for his cab-drivers and his other rabble down there. The greasy fellow had the impudence to interrupt me. And when I turned around, the waitresses laughed, the guests laughed—I could have wept.

MARIE [*anxiously*]. Robbie, be good.

ROBERT. Oh, it's nauseating, nauseating, all of it! Did a letter come for me? No, don't laugh, Joseph, don't laugh. It isn't funny in the least. I—[*softly*]—almost got to the point again—that—— [*Sighs deeply.*] Then I ran out. [*He sits down.*]

MARIE. Well, it's all over now. [*Takes his head and draws it to her bosom.*] Why do you draw back?

ROBERT [*softly*]. Oh, nothing. How the suds smell!

MARIE [*pale*]. Yes, Robert. I can't help that.

ROBERT. I know. Give me your hand. [*He*

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draws her hand to his forehead.] You touching, touching child. Good people—don't bother me.

MRS. PRINTZ. You're all excited again to-day, Robert. It's terrible.

MARIE [*gently*]. It's just as well that you won't play down there any more.

ROBERT. Of course it is. Anyhow, down there in that drinking-place, I seemed to be like a parody of myself! [MRS. PRINTZ *and* JOSEPH *laugh.*] H—m! Yes. But now I have no piano at all. Now I am done for. Now I can't go down there again.

MARIE. I know exactly what we'll do, Robert.

ROBERT. Well? Buy a Steinway for a thousand?

MARIE. No, I'll rent a piano for us. I went to find out—it costs ten marks a month. We can do that, at least.

MRS. PRINTZ. But, child, you gotta live.

ROBERT. Oh! [*He leans his head against* MARIE'S *bosom.*] No, no, no! I don't need a piano. Really I don't. I'll compose everything inwardly now. [*He walks to the window.*]

JOSEPH [*has turned away to conceal his amusement, grunts now*]. Inwardly!

MRS. PRINTZ. But Joseph! Come, children, we'll drink our coffee. [*Calls*]: Grete!

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[GRETE *comes back through door at right. Her eyes show signs of weeping. From the cupboard she takes a basket with rye buns.*]

I'll serve you first, Joseph. You're in a hurry.

JOSEPH. Oh, damn! It is late. [*Sits down.*] Thank you. [*He drinks in long draughts.*]

[ROBERT *steps back from the window.*]

MARIE [*hastens to him at once*]. Well, Robbie? Are you better now?

ROBERT. Yes. First that pain is in my temples. Then it goes farther back. Sweetheart, you mustn't worry.

MARIE. We'd better go to see the doctor tomorrow, hadn't we, Robbie?

ROBERT. Nonsense! Unless it's on your account. You look pretty wretched again. [*Breaking off.*] Well, Joseph? How is the silverware? [MARIE *goes to the stove.* ROBERT *stands immediately beside* JOSEPH *and whispers to him*]: Did you hear anything? [*He speaks in his ordinary voice again.*] You look quite splendid. Noble! I suppose you're going in search of adventures to-day?

GRETE [*bursts out laughing*]. Oh, Mr. Frey, ain't you too funny sometimes!

ROBERT [*ignores her*]. It's a beautiful day. Cool.

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Well, how about my coffee? No letter for me, eh? [MARIE *brings him his cup.*]

MARIE. Drink it, Robbie. It does you good to get somethin' warm.

MRS. PRINTZ. Did you go to the circulation department yesterday, Robert, on account o' my paper? No? You forgot it again. Then don't promise nothin' to start with.

MARIE. But, Auntie, what does it matter about one copy of the paper? You get lots of news every day. Come, Robbie, we'll move away from the table. Then the ammonia smell won't bother you. [*She carries two chairs near to the stove.*] No—here it's too hot again. [*Helplessly.*] A person don't know where to turn. [*She stands there with the two chairs.*]

[ROBERT *kisses her now that she's helpless.*]

MARIE. Be good now and sit down. Drink your coffee. [*They sit down next to each other and drink.*]

MRS. PRINTZ [*sits with* GRETE *at the work table. They both drink from earthenware mugs*]. But I don't see! Them people ought to send the paper reg'lar. That's what I pay my money for.

MARIE. What number is it?

ROBERT. Oh, it's at least two weeks ago. I'll drop in and see about it to-morrow.

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JOSEPH [*gets up in sudden haste, knocking several burnishing steels from the table*]. Now I gotta hurry——

GRETE. There he goes. [*Softly*]: Oh, the beast!

JOSEPH [*puts on his hat jauntily and takes his basket*]. Well, good-bye. Hope you'll have a good time.

GRETE. Same to you.

MRS. PRINTZ. Good-bye, Joseph.

GRETE. Don't you go makin' too many conquests. Spare them poor girls.

JOSEPH [*wants to make a witty repartee*]. Oh—aw—— [*But nothing occurs to him, so he blushes and limps out.*] Mornin'..

GRETE. Mother, will you look 'n see what you think o' my hat? It cost me fifty marks——

MRS. PRINTZ. You spend money, don't you?

GRETE. Fifty? For a hat like that? [*She and* MRS. PRINTZ *go out at the right. A pause.*]

MARIE [*stands behind* ROBERT]. Sweetheart, I'll dress up now.

ROBERT [*awakened from his thoughts*]. What?

MARIE. Oh, never mind. Nothin'.

ROBERT. No, no, what is it?

MARIE. Oh, I was just sayin' that I was goin' to dress.

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ROBERT. Yes, oh, yes, do that. Are you ready? Dress yourself nicely. [*A pause. Then suddenly quite lively*]: Listen!

MARIE [*straightening the tools on the table*]. Yes, dear?

ROBERT. No, never mind.

MARIE [*hurries to him at once*]. How was it last night? Did you work at all?

ROBERT. No. A little. Did you hear me when I played down there? That was Wagner. Did you stay downstairs?

MARIE [*hesitating*]. I would have lost too much time.

ROBERT. Is that so. Oh, well. It's a pity. I just happened to be in the right mood.

MARIE. Why don't you play somethin' by that other man——

ROBERT. That other? You mean Beethoven?

MARIE. When you played somethin' by him, it always made you sad. And that's better for you than to fly into a rage.

[*A pause.*]

ROBERT [*looks at her. Then starting up*]. I must have a piano.

MARIE. I told you: we can rent one.

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ROBERT. But ten marks a month—that's unthinkable.

MARIE. You let me look out for that. That you can have some rest and work properly—that's worth something to me, too! [*Cheerfully*]: It's the best kind of a bargain for me.

ROBERT. How's that?

MARIE. When you have a good piano an' don't have to run down to that old restaurant no longer, you'll get through with your work, an' then I'll get my share of the profit, too.

[ROBERT *takes her head in both of his hands and draws her to him, kissing her forehead.*]

MARIE [*yielding herself utterly to his caress. Softly*]. Love me!

ROBERT. Darling!

MARIE. Do you smell the suds?

ROBERT. No, that's your perfume. Oh, my God! It's terrible!

MARIE. What's terrible? [*She goes to the cupboard, unlocks it, and takes out a plateful of cherries.*] Look! I bought these yesterday. That's somethin' for you, Robbie. They'll be the last this season. [*She takes twin cherries and hangs them over her ears.*] Lovely earrings. Come! Bite!

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ROBERT [*bites off one of the cherries*]. Can't I nibble at the tree, too?

MARIE. No, it don't taste nice.

ROBERT [*kisses her. Then he grabs his hat and goes toward the left door*]. One moment. Dress yourself now. I'll be back directly.

MARIE. Where you goin'?

ROBERT. Just for some flowers. [*Exits.*

MARIE [*goes smiling to the right*]. Auntie!

MRS. PRINTZ [*from within*]. Yes?

MARIE. I'll clear the table now. [*She does so, speaking to the bird.*] Well, birdie, why are you so still? [*She whistles.*]

[MRS. PRINTZ *and* GRETE *enter from the right.*]

GRETE [*in a coquettish little jacket and a stylish hat which contrasts sharply with her pale, emaciated face*]. Well, good-bye, everybody. I'm off now.

MARIE. Good-bye.

MRS. PRINTZ. Don't stay so late, Grete!

GRETE. I'll be all right. Hope you have a nice time.

MARIE. Thanks! Same to you.

[GRETE *goes out.*

MRS. PRINTZ. What's become o' Robert?

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MARIE [*merrily*]. He's just gone for some flowers. It's so beautiful out. Auntie, do come along.

MRS. PRINTZ. No, child, I don't somehow feel right to-day.

[*The bell rings.*]

MARIE. Oh, please, Aunt, will you go? I suppose it's Robert.

MRS. PRINTZ. Ain't he got a key? [*She goes out at the left. A pause.*]

[MRS. PRINTZ *appears again followed by* ROLF MUNK.]

[*Morosely.*] Maisie, this here gentleman—— You want to see Robert? [*She goes out to the right.*

MARIE. I'm sorry. My intended is not at home.

ROLF [*who watches* MARIE *with inner excitement*]. Yes, I just heard. You'll pardon me. I suppose I should have rung across the hall.

MARIE. You could ha' rung a long time there. This is the place. He only sleeps across there. He just went a little ways. He'll be back right away. Won't you sit down? [*She pushes a chair forward.*]

ROLF. Well—otherwise I could come back.

MARIE. Oh, but why should you? He'll be back in a minute.

ROLF [*sits down. There is a brief silence*]. I was

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quite anxious to meet Mr. Frey. I'm a musician and I'm interested in him.

MARIE [*somewhat more warmly, but still with much reserve*]. He'll be very glad, I'm sure. He meets almost nobody. So you don't know my intended?

ROLF. Oh, yes. That is to say, it's several years ago. Mr. Frey was very young then. We met at Bayreuth.

MARIE. Where?

ROLF. At Bayreuth. That's where the great music festivals take place.

MARIE. H—m! I know.

ROLF. Mr. Frey was in business once, wasn't he? Or was meant to be a business man. He told me something like that, I believe.

MARIE. Yes, he was in his father's business.

ROLF. And now?

MARIE. Oh, he left there a long time ago. Almost two years. He's an artist an' has been since we were engaged.

ROLF. And how is he?

MARIE. Thank you, quite well.

ROLF. Has he the necessary quiet for his work?

MARIE. Well, of course he has quiet. He works all the time.

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ROLF. I suppose he has his own study.

MARIE. We're not livin' *Unter den Linden.* I c'n sit near him all right when he's busy with his thoughts.

ROLF. Ah, yes.

MARIE. Everything is quiet as can be. You c'n believe me. I see to that. I shine when he works——

ROLF. What? You shine?

MARIE. Yes: the silverware. He don't like the rattle of the burnishing steel. Quiet—you know I think he has too much quiet. He works much more'n he ought to. Now he's planning something big again—I don't know exactly how you call it.

ROLF. A quartet?

MARIE. No, that's not it.

ROLF. Symphony?

MARIE. Somethin' like that. Please don't touch the steels. It spoils 'em. But he hasn't learned enough, he says, to write it all down. Now he worries himself. If his family had let him study an' learn what he needs, he'd be a made man now. 'Cause the ideas, he says, he has 'em all. The family of my intended has always been his misfortune.

[*A pause.*]

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ROLF [*slowly*]. And how is his health?

MARIE. His nerves are sick.

ROLF. Ah!

MARIE [*gets up and approaches him*]. Can't one do anythin' for that? Tell me.

ROLF. Oh, to be sure. Rest! He oughtn't to work for a time.

MARIE. You won't get him with any such talk. That's all he takes pleasure in—to do somethin' an' then tell me about it.

ROLF. Does he tell you everything?

MARIE. Yes. He knows I—— He hasn't another soul in the world.

[*A pause.*]

ROLF [*passes his hand over his forehead. Rises*]. I can't wait any longer. Perhaps I'll meet him down on the street. [*The outer door is heard to close.*]

MARIE. You hear? He's comin' now.

[ROLF *starts, then pulls himself together and turns to the door in order to come, if possible, to an understanding with* ROBERT. ROBERT *enters with a bunch of violets in his hand.*]

ROLF [*swiftly*]. How do you do, Mr. Frey. Do you remember me? Beyer is my name——

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[ROBERT *stands very still and looks alternately at* MARIE *and at* ROLF.]

ROLF. I don't suppose you do remember. We met just once in Bayreuth.

ROBERT [*commanding himself*]. Ah—to be sure. Yes—very nice of you to look me up. How are you? May I introduce you? My betrothed——

ROLF. I've had the honor——

MARIE [*watches* ROBERT *with growing restlessness*]. Perhaps you gentlemen would like to discuss somethin'——

ROBERT [*gives her the flowers*]. Yes, sweetheart. The gentleman, you know—— Well, I'm really delighted! I remember clearly now——

MARIE. You'll call me, won't you?

ROBERT. Yes, yes.

ROLF [*to* MARIE]. I beg your pardon for disturbing you. I won't stay long. [*He shakes hands with her. She drops his hand slowly.*]

[MARIE *goes out at the right.*

[*Silence.* ROBERT, *pale, but with a look of determination, looks into* ROLF'S *eyes.*]

ROLF [*also pale, first smiles, and looks on the floor. Then*]: I overwhelmed you a bit, Robert. Don't be angry. I saw no other way.

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ROBERT. What do you want?

[*A pause.*]

ROLF. I have a message from your sister.

ROBERT [*softly*]. Did she show you my letter?

ROLF. Yes. She knew no other way.

ROBERT [*very red*]. And otherwise—did she show it to any one else?

ROLF. Yes, to your mother, too.

[*A deep silence.*]

ROLF. I couldn't infer anything from the letter but that you desired to establish some——

ROBERT [*excitedly*]. Why?

ROLF. Because you wrote that you felt such a longing.

[ROBERT *is silent. A sobbing shakes him. He turns away.*]

ROLF [*goes to him and takes his hand. There is a pause.* ROBERT *finds it difficult to control himself*]. Calm yourself, for heaven's sake! It's a crucial moment. We must be calm.

ROBERT [*raising his hand in protest*]. Go——

ROLF. Come, now, and calm yourself first. [*After a pause.*] Does no one hear us? But you are nervous, old fellow—frightfully nervous.

ROBERT. Leave me alone. Everything has come

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back to me. You could do anything with me now. Go, Rolf, I beg of you. I'm not normal. Don't take advantage of this mood. Please!

ROLF. It was unfeeling not to tell you directly of your father's death. On the other hand—if you'll forgive me—you said that the one thing you willed, with all your strength, was to be free of every fibre that united you to your family. And now? What can you complain of? What has wounded you? Your letter is a confession.

ROBERT. Yes—and now go—please—now that you know it. Otherwise I'm lost—done for! No, my dear fellow, I've gone through experiences. God save you from the like. And yet I am strong, I tell you. And if you want to reproach any one, please address yourself to my mother and to Uncle Ludwig. They've conquered in their way. But that's nothing. It passes. Here there's something sacred; here I'll stay; here I am what I've always been. [*After a pause.*] I've closed my accounts, dear friend. All that there's left for me to do in the world is to be faithful for a little. I've struggled honestly—I may well say that. But one must be born free in order to live freely, Rolf. Don't tell me that my environment hinders me. Life means

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want and sordidness; I knew that to begin with—but I wanted to overcome it. I had a vision of so many untrodden ways, of so much virgin soil. But my wounds from that separation were still raw. When I stood outside, the storm was too much for me. It scattered all my visions into shadows: I couldn't grasp what I had felt so intensely. Ah, Rolf, and the dear girl believes in me—with such childlike, with such rocklike faith.

ROLF. But does she understand you?

ROBERT. Dear friend, don't open the question of education. I'll never be able to repay her for what she has been to me. [*Softly.*] She doesn't know how it is with me. I'm really very ill, Rolf. Often I have no power over my will. And then—and that is the highest!—work in all my solitariness. But I can't write it down. Everything seems to tug at my heart—a fire of flame is in front of my eyes. Oh, death wouldn't be anything compared to that torment. How often have I yearned and fought for it. My God, let me perish! Let my heart fail! But no, no! And the terror increases—and then the abyss. [*A pause.*] Then, when I awaken, I feel her hand on my forehead. Then peace comes. And it's wonderful.

[*A deep silence.*]

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ROLF [*shaken by what he has heard*]. You must get out of here. You're ruining yourself.

ROBERT [*pale but smiles and says softly*]. You mean: I ought rather to ruin the girl? That's more practical. Yes. I know those practical ethics.

ROLF. But, man, consider. If you were to become well—— You can't feel that now. But you must be told. If you were to get well and study regularly, then—don't you think everything would be different?

ROBERT [*softly*]. It would have been—once. I've lost all confidence in myself. And in you, too. No, no! You were mistaken in me. What I had in me—it wasn't enough. That's all. Wagner is a vampire, Rolf. Oh, a most beautiful vampire. He gives one ecstasy, but he drags from you all that is your own. I need the love that does not torment. Do you remember when you opened all those new realms to me? You were so happy doing it. But I believe the sun struck us both blind. Both of us. [*Very softly.*] If I perish here—at least I won't disillusion my dear angel.

ROLF [*slowly*]. Are you so sure that you would have to disillusion her?

ROBERT. What!

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ROLF. Your father is dead. Those old struggles are dead and gone. Your mother longs for you. And you long for your mother.

[ROBERT *closes his eyes and makes a protesting gesture.*]

ROLF. No, Robert. You are clinging to the past simply because you haven't the courage to feel a new present. I witnessed something yesterday —something sacred. No, it's no mere phrase. You have a mother. That is what is eternal in the world.

ROBERT. I don't believe that now any longer.

ROLF. Then you sin against your mother. What will you say when she has died without you? When your sister showed her your letter, everything in her melted. Your uncle protested, but she only cried again and again: "I have repented! I have repented!"

[*A pause.*]

ROBERT [*in a toneless voice*]. You believe she would accept Marie now?

ROLF. She has the strength, yes. Your uncle doesn't count for anything now.

ROBERT. And Hetty?

ROLF. She esteems the girl. [*Softly.*] And so do I.

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ROBERT. Did you like her?

ROLF. Yes.

[*Silence.*]

ROBERT. No, no, no! The hatred has become too great. I belong to her, I know that. She has a right to me.

ROLF. When our mothers call us, they have the older right. You are trying to cover your dead with dust—the wind sweeps them free again.

ROBERT [*shudders and stares at him*]. Yes! I—see that.

[*A pause.*]

ROLF. If you hesitate you'll lose courage again.

ROBERT [*stares into space as though he saw a strange and beautiful vision*]. Give them—my love—at home——

ROLF. It would be best if you were to come with me at once.

ROBERT. Go downstairs a while. I must talk to Marie. Will you?

ROLF. Wouldn't it be better——

ROBERT. What? I'll come directly. [*He grasps* ROLF'S *hand.*] It all comes back to me——

[ROLF *holds his hand tightly.*]

ROBERT. The old days. My God, what a feeling!

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I'm so happy and so sad, too. It's like very early spring, when you go into the open——

ROLF. Your sister will be happy.

ROBERT. Give her my love.

ROLF. You are coming, Robert? [*He looks firmly into* ROBERT'S *eyes.*]

[ROBERT *nods hastily.*]

ROLF. I'll wait at the foot of the stairs. [*Exit.*

[ROBERT *stands leaning against the table. He is about to follow* ROLF, *but he stops and hesitates.*]

MARIE [*comes in from the right. Pale, with a searching glance in her eyes*]. Well, is he gone?

[ROBERT *is silent. His eyes are averted.*]

MARIE. What did he want?

ROBERT. Oh, nothing special. How did you like him?

MARIE. So, so. What's his name?

[ROBERT *is silent.*]

MARIE [*close by him, looks into his eyes*]. Wasn't it your old teacher? That fellow Munk? I just thought——

ROBERT. Well, yes——

MARIE. What did he want?

ROBERT. Marie, I beg of you! Be calm now.

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I've been so tormented these last days. Help me to make it a bit easier—I'm at the end of my strength.

MARIE. Well, what is it?

ROBERT. He came from my sister. My father is dead.

[MARIE *gazes at him with distorted features.*] I knew of it before. You people were asking after a copy of the paper. I kept it. The notice was printed there. He was sick for only a short time. No one told me a word. Now he is—on the other side.

MARIE [*with her head thrust back, murmurs*]. Dead. Mm——

ROBERT. At first I was quite mad. Everything seemed so—— I don't know——

MARIE [*as before*]. Why didn't you tell me?

ROBERT. I—couldn't. [*Very red, he suddenly kneels beside her, and puts his arms around her.*]

MARIE. Dead! [*Her face is distorted with hate.*]

ROBERT [*watches her and jumps up.*] Oh——!

MARIE. I can't help it. I'm glad.

ROBERT. I must see my mother again. I must go to her, if only for an hour. Everything will come out well. I know my mother.

MARIE. You're going?

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ROBERT. Yes. I beg of you, Marie—— I'm coming back.

MARIE. You're going?

ROBERT. For an hour. I just want to see them. You see, child, it's all different now. My father is no longer on earth. They're living out in Grünau with the Munks. I'll tell my mother that I owe you everything—my very life! My mother is really splendid at heart—and Hetty. Oh, it's all different from what you think! You're so embittered. I can't leave them in the lurch now. I must see them again. Then I'll come for you, and take you there. Then you'll stay with my mother.

MARIE. Never, Robert!

ROBERT. You don't know what kind of people they really are! They'll look up to you! We must become reconciled. [*He approaches her. There is anxiety and beseeching in his attitude and in his eyes.*]

MARIE [*with wildly protesting gestures, cries out*]. Never, Robert! Never!

[*A brief pause.* ROBERT *stands perfectly still, then he turns slowly, takes his hat, and goes out.* MARIE *stands motionless with clenched fists.*]

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MRS. PRINTZ [*comes in from the right. After a silence*]. You shoulda taken that feller Munk and kicked him out, that's what you shoulda done.

MARIE. But I didn't know for certain that it was he.

MRS. PRINTZ. Now you got the whole thing. All that has to happen is for some feller to come here and say: Dear Robert, everythin's forgiven an' forgotten—an' all you see is a pair o' heels.

MARIE. Aunt—[*hoarsely*]—I suppose you don't know what to think of it all?

MRS. PRINTZ. Know, my child? I've always known. I've always understood why you love him. But I told you again an' again. For a man that comes from that kind of a family, we can't mean nothin'. If he's a scamp, *you're* ruined: if he's decent, *he* is.

MARIE [*draws herself up suddenly, snatches her shawl from the bed, and wraps it around her*]. An' I'll show you all that I can win out.

MRS. PRINTZ. Why, how? What are you goin' to do?

MARIE. I'm going to Grünau and get him back.

MRS. PRINTZ [*about to get up*]. What——

MARIE. Sure. I've only got to say one word to

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him. I'll tell him now—now, an', my God, he'll be happy!

MRS. PRINTZ. You're——

MARIE. Auntie, now he's got to know.

MRS. PRINTZ. You're—— [*Falls silent.*]

MARIE [*smiling ecstatically. Her voice suddenly becomes soft and deep*]. I've known it long. But I didn't want to tell him. He would have been beside himself. But work—I can get that, Auntie, and advance payment, too, if I need it. And now he must know. Oh, Auntie! [*She kneels down and puts her head on the old woman's lap.*]

[MRS. PRINTZ, *deeply moved, bends over her.*]

MARIE. You don't know how dear it is—what I've just been telling you. Then he'll come, surely, then he'll come. Isn't it our own sweet child——

[*A pause.* MRS. PRINTZ *softly strokes her hair.*]

MARIE [*rising, gropes about*]. My shawl! So! An' now my jacket. Oh, yes. Good-bye.

MRS. PRINTZ. Stay——

MARIE. Good-bye, Aunt. [*Exit.*

Curtain

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ACT III

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ACT III

Grünau. The living-room of the FREY *family. Not large, but homelike. Old-fashioned furniture of dark wood. In the middle of the room a table with four tall-backed chairs. A somewhat worn rug covers the floor. To the left the sideboard. To the right a sofa covered with dark-red velvet and flanked by two similar armchairs. Over the sofa on the wall hang family photographs. The middle one is the picture of the late father. It is surrounded with crêpe. Doors to the right and left. In the rear wall a broad glass door which leads out to the veranda. Through it one can see the branches of the chestnut tree. In the left wall, far front, a window to the street. In the right corner, rear, a dark tile oven. It is toward three o'clock in the afternoon.* HEDWIG *stands toward the left in the foreground, pressing her forehead to the window-pane.* LOUISE *is setting the table for afternoon coffee.*

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LOUISE [*watches* HEDWIG *while she herself arranges the cups on the table. Trying to start a conversation*]. There'll be a rush on the lake steamers again to-day, Miss. There ain't a table left over at the inn.

HEDWIG. H—m! [*She continues to look out.*]

LOUISE. That's because they have one more fine Sunday. It's just like spring out. An' the train c'n take lots an' lots o' people. Last Whitsuntide, they tell me that people was layin' an' waitin' at the station till three o'clock in the mornin'. Just think of it—little children an' all, Miss!

HEDWIG [*keeping her position*]. Yes.

LOUISE. What always scares me is the idea of the Missus goin' into the woods Sunday evenin'. There's tramps aroun', an' you don't know what might happen.

HEDWIG. Is Uncle Ludwig upstairs?

LOUISE. No, he's playin' *skat* at Krüger's. [*After a pause*]: A funny thing happened while I was with the Missus this mornin'.

HEDWIG. What was it?

LOUISE. Well, I was standin' at the stove an' cleanin' a pike, an' the Missus, she was cuttin' the noodles—when all of a sudden she begins to tell

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about young Mr. Robert! Just think, Miss! An' that's somethin' she never does.

HEDWIG [*intensely interested*]. And what did she tell you?

LOUISE. Oh, she just talked kind o' quiet. She said he was gettin' along fine now an' had written somethin' great—an' so on. Well, I was surprised. I got cold all over. Mr. Robert has been livin' in Vienna, she told me, an' now he wants to come back home. [*Softly*]. Is that really so, Miss?

HEDWIG. Yes, it is possible.

LOUISE. That'd be awful fine. I know how the Missus has been longin' an' longin' after your brother. Is everythin' all right again now?

HEDWIG. Yes, yes. But don't talk about it. You'll be sensible as usual, Louise, won't you?

[*A pause.*]

LOUISE. It's a pity the master didn't live to see this day. [*Exit.*

HEDWIG [*remains standing, but rings her hands in her dread and anxiety*]. God grant that it turns out well. [*There is a pause. Then* ROLF MUNK *is seen to cross the veranda and enter.* HEDWIG *is startled and goes to meet him. Feverishly.*] Well?

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ROLF [*pale, excited, but smiling*]. He's coming. [*He slips off his overcoat.*]

HEDWIG. He is coming?

ROLF. Yes. Sh! Be quiet now. Don't want your mother to hear.

HEDWIG. Mamma is out in the woods. I'll get her later. How is he? How does he look?

ROLF. He's changed greatly, very greatly. I tell you that so you may be prepared.

HEDWIG [*standing still*]. Changed?

ROLF. Naturally. You can imagine.

HEDWIG. He didn't suffer want, did he?

ROLF. No—oh, spiritually. The girl guarded him from bodily want. Did everything for him anyhow, loves the boy quite madly. That'll give you an idea what it meant to persuade her to let him go.

HEDWIG. But he *is* coming?

ROLF. Yes, yes. He's in the grounds now. So, courage! Three times on the way he wanted to escape. But his longing was too great, after all. And I really did say everything that was humanly possible.

HEDWIG [*clasps his hand firmly*]. Thank you——

ROLF. You'll have a difficult hour with him. Remember that. He's not a well man——

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HEDWIG [*shaken*]. Is he ill?

ROLF. His nervous system has been rasped to the utmost. The reproaches and everything. First of all we must make him well. But you, with your love, you'll be able to do it. I know that quite certainly. And you are just as dear to him as ever. I heard that in every word he said.

HEDWIG [*weeping*]. We'll all love him——

ROLF. Yes, his is a wounded heart. But now—you mustn't cry. Not that! Are you losing courage already? You mustn't cry. Come now!

HEDWIG [*very softly*]. I'm so afraid. [*She leans against him.*]

ROLF [*warmly*]. Be calm—be calm——

HEDWIG. And I'm so happy, too——

ROLF. Come to me! Come! [*He draws her close to him.*]

HEDWIG. Oh, my dear—— [*Silence.*]

ROLF [*bends over and kisses her*]. You feel better now? Freer?

HEDWIG. I was always lonely.

ROLF. So was I.

HEDWIG. We'll be together now.

ROLF. Always. [*There is a deep and happy*

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silence. Then she draws herself up, tearful but smiling.]

HEDWIG. Well, are my eyes very red?

ROLF. Come here! [*He dries her eyes with his kerchief.*]

HEDWIG. You'll make me better——

ROLF. My dear, I'd be more like you.

HEDWIG. And I like you. You are so free, and so kind.

ROLF. Oh, I am——

HEDWIG. Everything will be well now.

ROLF. Yes. [*He kisses her.*] I must go to meet your brother. [*He goes toward the glass door.*]

[HEDWIG *looks after him. Her hands are folded.*]

ROLF [*turns at the door*]. It's beautiful, isn't it?

HEDWIG. Yes. [ROLF *goes out.*

[*There is a pause.* HEDWIG *stands for a moment with outstretched arms. Then she closes her hands in her happiness and turns back to the window. There is another pause. Then* ROLF *appears with* ROBERT *on the veranda.* ROLF *is seen speaking to him persuasively. At last he opens the door, lets* ROBERT *enter, and himself hastens back into*

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the garden. ROBERT *stands by the door. He has no overcoat. His hat is in his hands. He is pale, his features are distorted. There is sweat on his forehead. His eyes do not look up.*]

HEDWIG. Robert—— [*She approaches him slowly.*]

ROBERT [*starts nervously*]. I can't stay long.

HEDWIG. Oh, can't you? Do stay with us.

ROBERT. To hear empty phrases——

HEDWIG. Won't you give me your hand?

ROBERT [*draws back*]. Don't let's be sentimental, above all.

HEDWIG [*in rising dread*]. Why don't you come nearer—and sit down?

ROBERT. What for?

HEDWIG. Robert, you wrote to me. Do you remember what you wrote?

ROBERT. I was so tormented. And it is you people that broke me. But first you maltreated me, roughly and shamefully.

HEDWIG. Not I.

ROBERT. No, not you. Oh, Hetty! It's like being pulled apart. I can't bear it.

HEDWIG [*softly*]. You'll gain peace.

ROBERT. Why did you send Munk? All I had

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left was the power of being alone. Then—when I read in the paper about Papa's death—then the longing began. [*Suddenly.*] Is that his picture? [*He goes a little to the left and stares at the photograph.*]

HEDWIG. Robert!

ROBERT [*staggers in an access of faintness, grasps after something. She supports him. He sits down*]. Ah—I believed—I——

[HEDWIG *stands silently by him.*]

ROBERT [*speaking with difficulty, half to himself*]. Time passes. I must get back. She'll do herself some hurt. She loves me so!

HEDWIG. Bring her here to us. I'll take care of her as though she were my sister. Mamma will be good to her, too. Robert, don't be so wild. Time clears up many things.

ROBERT. Do you know what she has done for me?

HEDWIG. Yes, Robert. Rolf Munk told me. But more than that must be done for you—what the girl never could do for you. You suffer living with her. You're very sick, I know. When you're well again you'll be able to work again, too. She must give you liberty for that. And if she loves you, she won't hesitate. Just bring her to us.

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ROBERT. No, Hetty, you don't know. If I were to tell her that living with her makes me suffer —it would break her very heart. That's what she toiled for—to help me rise with her, through her. She hates you all, Hetty, she hates you so——

HEDWIG. Then I'll go to her.

ROBERT. No, no! I'd protect you from her.

HEDWIG. Don't you yourself feel that you must get out of all that torment? And if you leave us now—I don't know what would happen to Mamma. She has paid in suffering. Now she has a right to you, so long as you live. You know that.

ROBERT. You don't know all that I've had to renounce already. I won't accomplish anything now, Hetty. [*More passionately*]: Otherwise, it would have been there, in that workroom, in that suffocating air—there I would have had to triumph. And into that room I should have brought that triumph as her very own to the poor woman who gave me her youth! If I tell her now, I've got to study—my family will support me. That's no return for her love.

ROLF [*appears on the veranda, opens the door quickly, and calls in softly*]. Look here, your mother is coming. I'll stop her a bit.

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HEDWIG. Mamma is coming!

ROBERT. Let me get out!

HEDWIG. Be calm, Robert, you can't——

ROBERT [*goes about nervously*]. My hat! What kind of a fool is your maid anyhow? Where did she put my hat? I want my hat!

HEDWIG. Be quiet! Don't rage so! This isn't a game we're playing.

[*Swiftly* HEDWIG *goes out on the veranda, from which, in a moment,* MRS. FREY *enters the room. There is a pause.* ROBERT *hastens forward and stands, with his back turned and his fists clenched.* HEDWIG *reënters.*]

MRS. FREY [*is pale but determined. With artificial calm to* HEDWIG]. What were you saying?

[HEDWIG, *embarrassed, keeps silent.*]

ROBERT [*makes a convulsive but vain effort to overcome his inhibition and turn around. Then, softly*]. How do you do, Mamma?

MRS. FREY. How do you do, Robert? [*After a pause*]: Look here, won't you turn around?

[ROBERT *turns hastily. He tries to look up, but lowers his eyes again.*]

MRS. FREY [*to* HEDWIG]. He looks fairly well. Don't you think so?

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[HEDWIG *moves a little to the left, regarding her mother with astonishment.*]

MRS. FREY. Well, now you've both grown dumb again. I would have thought—we haven't seen each other for two years—one might shake hands, or—— [*Her artificial calm is beginning to break down.*]

ROBERT. Mamma, you're very good, but I can't take that seriously. People who parted as we did—must stay apart. Never mind the play acting——

MRS. FREY. What do you mean by that?

ROBERT. All of you took good care that I can have no faith in you.

MRS. FREY [*pale and softly*]. Don't think of it any more. You don't know what lies behind me. I had no will of my own in those days. Yet you must go and keep your father's grave in honor.

ROBERT. Did he ask after me while he lived? Did he ever concern himself over my real character, my true inclinations? You tormented me, and when, at last, I really found myself, you kicked me out.

MRS. FREY [*stands with bowed head. After a pause, speaking with conflict and difficulty*]. So you mean simply and baldly—— Am I to beg you? That—I can't. I had one wish left in life—that

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something might be made up to you for—— Your father suffered agony in his death. Only he didn't speak. Am I to die so, too? You have a certain duty, too.

ROBERT [*softly but with passionate earnestness*]. I considered my own liberation my duty toward you and Papa. I felt how enslaved I was. And you, Mamma! That you, too, bowed to that fetishism of the will. I asked myself a thousand times in those days: How can she? Merely as a human being, even if she is his wife! Because I knew that you were really different. And so you seemed cowardly to me. Have you any idea what that means to a child? How could you endure that?

[*A pause.*]

MRS. FREY [*pale and hesitatingly*]. I'll tell you how I could. The spirit that fills you—I realized it—perhaps I knew it from my own experience. I admired it, too. But we're not born into the world of our yearnings, Robert. What did my life with your father amount to? I served for thirty years. Any expert cook could have replaced me. The moment of violent liberation—which you exalt so—I passed that moment and overcame it thirty times in the thirty years. Because I had my children.

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Because you two were there. And now tell me: Did your liberty bring you happiness? I doubt it. I believe our liberation lies in service. That way is difficult, to be sure: the other is easier.

[*A pause.*]

MRS. FREY. Bring the girl here. It will be well.

ROBERT. She won't come.

MRS. FREY. All will be well, I tell you.

ROBERT. It's too late.

MRS. FREY [*angrily*]. Then it is because you want to go to the dogs. The girl is a hundred times stronger than you, and if my idea of her is right, she'll rather give you up than see you ruined. Live or take your life! You wanted to get out into the world. You cannot now accuse those who gave birth to your soul!

[ROBERT *stares at his mother.*]

HEDWIG. Yes, Robert. Be calm a little first. Collect yourself. The old strength will come back. That's what Mamma means.

MRS. FREY. Nonsense! I mean quite simply this: Accomplish something. All ways and means will be given you. Nothing will be lacking. But I can't help it, I am distrustful of people who despair of themselves. I had good cause to despair, and

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yet—— [*A pause.*] Call the woman here. It will all be right. Genuine sorrow like genuine joy follows after work. That's it. Before we talk any more you're to drink something—a good cup of coffee. Everything else will be adjusted. I'll write to the woman later. Just be calm. If I write to her, she'll condescend to be persuaded. [*Exit.*

[ROBERT *stands moveless and silent.*]

HEDWIG [*approaches* ROBERT. *Gently and carefully*]. Do you find Mamma changed?

ROBERT [*after a pause, almost to himself*]. When one considers—all the passion—all the ambitions—all that to be dead! As though it had never been. And yet it was! Hetty, it's strange!

HEDWIG. An artist ought to be happy.

ROBERT [*looks at her dreamily and yet searchingly*]. Ought to. Even in his misery. What words you people have now. [*Louder and more excitedly.*] Hetty, you are different!

HEDWIG. Since Papa is dead, you mean?

ROBERT. It seems as though seeds that were never in it began to blossom in a ruined field.

HEDWIG. The seeds were there, Robert. Always. Only in you they were stronger, more vital, than in Mamma and me.

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ROBERT [*looks out into the twilight*]. It's a terrible and yet a beautiful thing to see how you were enslaved, too.

HEDWIG. Don't reproach Papa. No man thinks beyond himself.

ROBERT. Oh, it isn't that. A little amiability. A little distinction and polish. It isn't necessary to be absolutely at one. If only there are wishes, aspirations, that pass beyond the misery of daily life. A touch of the Hellenic. What is it I wanted? A bit of beauty—for myself, and for you, too.

[*The rosy afterglow shines in through the glass door.*]

HEDWIG. Won't you sit down, Robert? [*She leads him to the sofa.*]

ROBERT. You live delightfully here. It's the house of Rolf's mother, isn't it?

HEDWIG. Yes, Robert. It's beautiful by the river. It's so quiet.

ROBERT [*sits with his face toward the veranda. Weary and dreamily*]. Up there, in her room, it's beautiful, too. When the sun sets it's like streams of blood behind the smoke of the factories. [*A pause.*] Everything is milder here. It was good of Rolf that he brought you.

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HEDWIG [*after a silence, carefully*]. What are you working at now, Robert?

ROBERT. I'd like to work.

HEDWIG [*quickly, with fine understanding*]. And you will, too, Robert. When once you're calmer——

ROBERT. You see, our mother—I'm not deceived about that—she speaks from her old, narrow circle. And yet that fine ruthless power of hers, that strength to *be*—ah, I'd like to share that. But, Hetty, one would have to learn a great deal. One cught to be sustained on all sides by art and by beauty that need not be sought for. Ah—then one could utter one's self without effort. I tell you a man is damnably dependent on noble influences. [*A pause.*] What a magnificent piano you have! [*He opens the piano and strikes a chord. They are both silent until the sound has died away.*]

[ROLF *appears at the glass door. Remains standing.*]

HEDWIG [*observes him, opens the door*]. Do come in. Mamma is gone.

ROLF [*enters*]. Well, you prodigal! How do you like it at home?

ROBERT [*at the sight of* ROLF *is overcome by an uncertain, driving fear*]. Dear Hetty, I'd like to dis-

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cuss something with Munk. Would you mind leaving us for a bit? Just a moment.

HEDWIG. Surely, Robert. [*Exit.*

ROLF. Why do you send your sister away? Don't you like her any more?

ROBERT. I like her beyond everything. [*He walks about nervously.*] Oh, if I could only stay here.

ROLF. You can. Do be sensible. Put her to the test! Say to her: let me live if you love me. You'll be astonished—— [*Breaking off suddenly. After a pause.*] By the way: Do you love—her?

[ROBERT *looks down: his face flushes.*]

ROLF. You might as well tell me.

ROBERT [*softly*]. I—don't know. It's strange—but I really don't know. I never experienced any intoxication. She was my last source of peace and trust. She touched me so—that must be love. I believe one ought never to ask that question, Rolf. Analysis destroys. Have you ever loved?

ROLF. So you do ask!

ROBERT. Hetty?

ROLF [*with a touch of humor*]. She touched me so, too—that must be love.

ROBERT [*looks at him long and steadily. Tears*

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come into his eyes]. That's beautiful. Truly so. [*A pause.*] Oh, but let me go. It hovers over me —all that drives me away. And one must follow that more willingly than one's friends. I would like to remain an honest man. Let me—go to her. [*He approaches the glass door. On the veranda are seen approaching* MRS. FREY, LUDWIG FREY, *and* HEDWIG.]

MRS. FREY [*opens the door and shoves her brother-in-law in*]. Now, Ludwig, please have some sense.

FREY. Don't, my dear Dora. [*He remains standing and looks both shyly and sombrely at* ROBERT, *who answers the look similarly.*]

HEDWIG [*softly to* ROBERT]. Go up to him, Robert, please!

[ROBERT *approaches.* FREY *turns away.*]

HEDWIG. Uncle, aren't you going to shake hands with Robert?

[FREY *stands motionless.*]

MRS. FREY [*in nervous excitement*]. Well, then, don't! Don't be so uncomfortable, though! There! [*Forcibly she joins their hands.*]

FREY. So you're back again?

ROBERT. Yes.

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FREY. And you want to become a respectable, dutiful man again?

ROBERT. In a sense, yes.

FREY. I hope that the school of life has convinced you of the necessity of it. Well, and are you free? Or are there going to be drags——

ROBERT. I don't understand.

FREY. I mean: have you forgotten that particular delusion? Or are you in any way bound to the person in question—legally bound, I mean?

ROBERT [*with twitching lips*]. Legally—no.

MRS. FREY [*suddenly*]. Oh, pshaw! Never mind all that now. Let the boy have a little peace. [*She goes to the background to join* LOUISE *and gives her directions.*]

[FREY *moves over to the right, sits down on an armchair, and takes up a newspaper.* ROBERT *watches him with a bitter smile.*]

ROLF [*softly to* HEDWIG]. Are you my sweetheart?

HEDWIG. Oh, you—— [*They separate as* MRS. FREY *turns around.*]

[LOUISE *has gone out again.*]

MRS. FREY. There is Mrs. Munk, Hetty. Now we can soon have our coffee. [*She steps out on the*

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veranda and meets MRS. MUNK. *Then she withdraws.*]

[FREY *gets up and puts his paper away.*]

MRS. MUNK [*comes in. With gentle cordiality*]. How do you do, everybody? Forgive me for having kept you waiting. [*She goes up to* ROBERT *and takes his hand in both of hers.*] My dear Mr. Robert! Do you remember me? It's easy to forget an old woman.

ROBERT. You are Rolf's mother?

MRS. MUNK [*watches him with intense sympathy. With genuine feeling*]. Yes, my dear Mr. Robert. And I'm very happy to see you here again. [*She points to* ROLF.] He's happy, too.

ROLF. Rather!

MRS. MUNK. You'll like it out here with us. We all need to be alone. Art is a blessing if one has it, and can enjoy it quietly and without having to please any one. That's what my dear husband used to say. He wasn't a great composer, but he was a true artist.

FREY [*with brutal suddenness*]. Well, where's the coffee, Hetty? Aren't we going to have it soon?

HEDWIG. Mamma isn't here yet.

FREY. Well, where the deuce is she?

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HEDWIG. I don't know. She went out a minute ago. [*She opens the door at the right.*] Louise! [LOUISE *appears.*] Where did mother go?

LOUISE [*with an embarrassed smile*]. Oh, yes, she —but I wasn't to say nothin'. She went an' got the key to the cellar.

HEDWIG. To the cellar! But why?

ROBERT [*as though awakening*]. What is it? Where is Mamma? [*He goes out on the veranda and calls*]: Mamma! [*The glass door is left open.*]

MRS. FREY [*from below*]. I'm coming now, Robert. You needn't cry so.

MRS. FREY [*appears at the door to the right, very hot and fighting for breath. One can see that she has stumbled and fallen. She carries a large platter with an enormous Berlin pound cake on it*]. My, but that was a job! Here I am again, though.

FREY. What are you dragging along there?

HEDWIG. Good heavens! Did you fall, Mamma? Or what? [*She relieves her mother of the platter.*]

ROLF. Did you fall? [*He brings a chair.*]

MRS. FREY [*sits down*]. Well, if you want to put it that way. You can't call it that, exactly. I really deserve a prize. I fell *up* the stairs.

HEDWIG. You're sure you didn't hurt yourself?

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MRS. FREY. Nonsense, Hetty. Just a moment's fright. It's so beastly dark down in the cellar. And I had both hands full, so I couldn't hold a light.

HEDWIG. But why didn't you tell me?

MRS. FREY. You're right. I should have taken Louise down with me. But I wanted her to go on washing dishes.

MRS. MUNK. You're sure you're not hurt? One sometimes notices that later, when the fright is over.

MRS. FREY. Not a bit, Mrs. Munk. It's all right. Well, Hetty, what do you say now? You needn't stare! I'm no ghost. You'd better look at this fellow here. [*She points to the cake.*] Aren't you a bit surprised?

HEDWIG. Yes. But tell me, Mamma, when did you bake it?

MRS. FREY. This morning, Miss! Of course you stood all morning at the window watching for your brother. If people come to see you they can starve. But we must celebrate a little for Robert, mustn't we, Louise?

LOUISE [*radiant*]. Yes, Mrs. Frey. An' didn't it turn out fine?

MRS. FREY. It's a good thing we didn't go to the

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trouble for nothing. [*Bends forward to get a better view of* ROBERT *who stands quite motionless and looks toward the left.*] Well, Robert. Your old favorite. You haven't lost the taste for it, have you? Old German pound cake. Try it.

[ROBERT *stands still as though his thoughts were wandering.*]

MRS. FREY. Well, Robert, don't you want any?

HEDWIG [*who regards* ROBERT *anxiously*]. He's still worried about you, Mamma. That you didn't really hurt yourself.

MRS. FREY. But no! Not the least bit! Come here, my boy, everything is all right.

[FREY *stamps his foot in anger and impatience.* ROBERT *walks slowly to his mother. He staggers, falls to his knees, and cries. A deep pause.*]

HEDWIG. Oh!

ROLF [*softly*]. Let be! It'll pass!

MRS. FREY [*bends low over her son, she passes her hand over his hair, and whispers*]: My child! My dear boy!

Curtain

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ACT IV

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ACT IV

The same scene as that of the third act. The afterglow shines in from the garden.

LOUISE [*enters after a short silence, carefully on tip-toe, looks around the room and then calls softly and excitedly back into the hall*]. Come on in! Nobody in here. They've all gone into the garden. What? No, I'll go down an' tell the young lady! No, there ain't no other way. If I say anythin' to the young gentleman the missus'll notice it! You just wait a minute. I'll be back right away. Yes, yes! [*She hurries through the room.*] Oh, dear! [*She goes out across the veranda.*]

[*The door at the right remains open. After awhile* MARIE *appears in the dusk of the doorway. She stands there motionless, her dark headkerchief framing her pallid face. With heartbreaking suspense she gazes out on the veranda. There is a pause.* LOUISE *and* HEDWIG *enter swiftly from the veranda.*]

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HEDWIG [*deeply stirred*]. Stay downstairs, Louise. See that no one comes. If any one does, knock at once.

[LOUISE *withdraws.* HEDWIG *passes her hand over her forehead for a moment, then goes slowly to the right and remains standing in front of* MARIE.]

MARIE [*with lowered head and without moving, monotonously*]. I beg your pardon——

[HEDWIG *silently takes the girl's two hands and holds them firmly in her own.* MARIE *looks up.*]

HEDWIG. This is what I've always wished. I thank you so much. [*After a pause, since* MARIE *is still silent.*] Come in here. We'll sit down. You look tired. [*She leads her into the room by her hand.*]

MARIE [*harshly, but in a low voice*]. I beg your pardon, but I wanted to talk to your brother——

HEDWIG. Yes, yes, but we mustn't frighten him.

MARIE. Frighten him?

HEDWIG. If he sees you suddenly—won't you come? I would so like to talk to you first.

MARIE. I'm sorry. I wanted to talk to your brother. I know right well that you can simply

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kick me out if you want to. But I think you might do me the favor.

[HEDWIG *keeps silent and looks with sad insistence into* MARIE'S *eyes.* MARIE *looks on the floor.*]

HEDWIG. If you hadn't come here to-day, I would have come to you to-morrow, Marie.

MARIE. You?

HEDWIG. We are so deeply in your debt. It would be so kind of you if you wouldn't make it all too hard for us now.

MARIE. What all?

HEDWIG. You've done so infinitely much for my brother.

MARIE. Not much—an' not because he was your brother.

HEDWIG [*bending forward*]. Do you think I can't understand how much you love him?

MARIE. No, really, I don't believe you can! But I wish you wouldn't talk any more now, Miss. It frightens me. Do me the favor—it's all you can do for me—call Robert. But don't let your mother know.

HEDWIG [*after a pause*]. Did Robert ever tell you about me?

[MARIE *is silent.*]

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HEDWIG. Never?

MARIE. Well, of course, often.

[*A pause.*]

HEDWIG. When I look into your eyes, I see again all my brother's misery and the misery of all our childhood. I've often imagined how you must look. I see now that my image of you was quite right. You must know what I was to my brother. When my parents renounced him, it just broke my heart in two. You—oh, you were much braver than I. Your love really had power, too. You have become my sister. What separates us must never be as deep as all that unites us.

MARIE [*softly*]. I could tell you a good bit, too, but I can't do it like you do. A person like myself is just made unhappy by talk. If you have a good opinion of me, if you got a notion of what's goin' on inside o' me, call your brother. There isn't much time left.

[*A pause.*]

HEDWIG. You mustn't be so bitter. You're in the remarkable position of having been victor over my mother. She has written to you and asked for a reconciliation. You can't imagine what that means to my mother.

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MARIE. I don't know your mother at all. What you say—that's all well an' good. An' I'm willin' to believe that you've had a hard time, too. But I don't know why you should tell me all that. I worked an' worked—day an' night. That takes courage, a lot of it, I tell you. But I had my own notion why I sat there—what I wanted—what I *had* to have! I wanted to pull him through. Just me and nobody else. He was to owe his success to me. Now it's easy to say: we'll be reconciled; we're sorry for what we've done. There was a time—you know when—then you should ha' showed your love. Then I was the only one, an' I've been the only one. I understand him through an' through—an' he knows it!

[*A pause.*]

HEDWIG. But have you also considered, Marie, why he came to us to-day?

MARIE [*breaking out*]. Because you tricked him into coming—that's why! If you hadn't sent that fool of a music teacher, he wouldn't ha' dreamed of such a thing!

HEDWIG [*restrains herself. As gently as before*]. No, Marie. You must know that he wrote me.

MARIE [*suddenly cold and antagonistic although*

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tears come into her eyes]. That's right. He wrote. Yes. Well, what did he write?

HEDWIG. He wrote that he felt such a longing—that he loved you indeed, but that—[*hesitatingly*]—he was feeling wretched. And there was something more than longing in that letter.

MARIE. What?

HEDWIG. Terror.

MARIE. Terror of what?

HEDWIG [*eager to spare the girl*]. Any mental worker, Marie, needs to be stimulated. I mean his talent isn't enough. He has to learn, to study. To the artist the chance to work is all-important.

MARIE. Well, he worked with me.

HEDWIG. You helped him all you could. I know that. But Robert is not wholly developed—sufficiently I mean to create something beautiful and worth while. He hasn't had the schooling. And to work creatively without that schooling—his gifts aren't big enough for that.

MARIE. How do you know that? I know that he's got ability.

HEDWIG. But he himself isn't so sure of it. He doubts himself. He told me that.

[MARIE *looks down again.*]

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HEDWIG. And that's what tormented him so cruelly. The fear that he would never accomplish anything.

MARIE. I thought he was always working.

HEDWIG. Oh, yes, when he's able to gather all his inner forces again and can be happy in his heart again—then he'll be able to work again—as effectively as ever.

MARIE [*quite motionless*]. He's got to study, you mean.

HEDWIG. Yes, Marie.

[*A pause.*]

MARIE. He never told me that.

HEDWIG. Because he didn't want to frighten you. He didn't know what to do. But that gnawed at him and gnawed, and it would have destroyed him. He's sick, Marie.

MARIE. Sick?

HEDWIG. His nerves are sick. And that disease can become frightful.

MARIE. You mean to say he got sick livin' with me?

HEDWIG. It isn't your fault. It is far more our own.

MARIE. Maybe so. [*A pause.*]

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HEDWIG [*softly, holding her hand*]. Give him a chance—the chance to get well. You're not to lose him.

MARIE [*after a pause*]. I don't suppose you realize yourself what you're sayin'. But you ought to. You know whom you're talkin' to. There can't be any reconciliation with me—even if I did it for Robert's sake. Everybody has got to remain true to themselves. If you had my life behind you, you'd say the same. Some things can't be made possible.

[HEDWIG *releases her hand.*]

MARIE. What does Robert say to all this? Has he got the same opinion as you have?

HEDWIG [*closing her eyes*]. He feels a great power struggling within him. Something that must not—ought not—to be destroyed.

MARIE. Yes. [*With lowered head she sits silently for a space*]. Yes. But I got to talk to him anyhow.

HEDWIG. My dear sister——

[MARIE *suddenly breaks down and sinks her head into* HEDWIG'S *lap.*]

HEDWIG [*puts her arms about the girl*]. Be calm, dear.

MARIE [*weeps long. There is a profound pause*]. I beg your pardon. It is lovely that I had a chance

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to talk to you. But please don't say nothin' more now. I can't bear to think ahead. If I do, I'd just die, I know that. I got to keep my senses about me. An' I want to thank you for all the sweet things you've said to me. What'll happen now—I haven't a notion. Time'll show. [*She looks up, very pale, but smiling.*] That's the way it is. But you remember me, Miss. It's dear of you to respect me, really. You got somethin' so tender about you. I've felt that in no church even. [*She leans forward, takes* HEDWIG'S *hand and presses it to her own breast.*] I'll do the last thing for him. I'll keep still an' go. But I'm keepin' somethin' of your brother's—— [*With a weary, mature, and poignant smile.*] I don't know who's more in the right. [*She closes her eyes for a moment.*] But I'm willin' your brother should be. Yes, I'm willin'.

[HEDWIG *sits motionless and regards her with profound astonishment.*]

MARIE. He don't know. When I came, I wanted to take him with me—an' tell him what's to be. I don't suppose I'll tell him now. An' you—you've got to promise me that you won't do it, either, Miss. If you do, it'll be all over.

[HEDWIG *continues to sit silent.*]

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MARIE [*rises*]. An' now call him, please.

HEDWIG [*rises softly*]. But, oh, you mustn't feel yourself thrust out.

MARIE. The baby'll help me. [*Looks at her.*] His child.

[HEDWIG *answers her look. Then slowly, with lowered head, she goes out across the veranda.*]

MARIE [*stands still, a little bent, and murmurs*]: An' now—now——

ROBERT [*crosses the veranda quickly, hurries to her, and takes her into his arms*]. Oh, it's so good that you've come.

MARIE. Robert, I've just been talkin' to your sister.

ROBERT. Well, and how do you like Hetty? Isn't she splendid? Didn't I tell you so?

MARIE. Yes, your sister was very good to me. Next to you, I think she's the best human being I've ever known.

ROBERT. You don't know how delighted I am. [*As she continues to stand in the same rigid position, he lifts her chin and looks into the deadly pallor of her face.*] Forgive me that I didn't come for you at once. But I was so torn and divided. Now everything is being clarified. [*Softly and*

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beseechingly.] And now I'd like to take you to my mother.

MARIE. No, Robert. Listen to me. We've got to consider. An' we got to consider quietly. Your sister's been tellin' me how it is with you. An' she convinced me, Robert. She says you're sick. That's what I always said, too. But if you know all that, why—why wasn't you honest with me about it?

[ROBERT *lets his head sink on her bosom.*]

You see—that wasn't right. You hurt yourself that way. You could ha' told me without worryin'——

ROBERT. Don't say that so calmly, for God's sake!

MARIE. You see, my darling, I love you too much—I couldn't stand it to think all the time: he's livin' with me an' it's ruinin' him. What would ha' been the good o' that kind of a life for me? That'd be more terrible than losing you altogether.

ROBERT. Don't say such things, for God's sake! There's something higher than our future, our ambitions. The real content of life—what's truly sacred! You, you must be happy! My poor darling! My poor——

MARIE [*scarcely audible*]. But if I tell you myself that I'm willin' for you to be free?

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ROBERT. You couldn't say that ever. And if you did I wouldn't believe you.

MARIE [*draws herself up*]. No, Robert. Tell me honestly—honestly: Is your sister right? Does the idea that you can study give you a lot of hope? Do you think all this'll make you well? I can see that you'd have better care an' the friends that you need here in your home.

ROBERT. I'll tell you, dearest, what came over me when I got back here. [*Pause.*] It's only now that I feel—how sick I am and how much I've had to go through. But at the same time there arose something else in me—something quite new and with such power that I could hardly contain myself. Since father's death, you see, my mother and sister have become different—free souls. All the beauty in them that was so enslaved comes to the light now. There's nothing in them or me that doesn't cry out for reconciliation. And my inner strength has been set free! Oh, the blessedness of work, of creation! It's that that makes one human. And one feels that all one had held to be impossible comes to meet one. You can reach it all by profound and solitary and inexorable work. [*Aware suddenly of his own passion, he turns aside.*]

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MARIE [*has watched him silently. There are tears in her eyes. After a further silence*]. That's just it. That's why you got to stay here now quietly, you understand, an' study everythin' that's necessary. [ROBERT *is about to speak.*] Listen to me now. An' then—when you're ready—then you can come to me an' I'll have you again. I think that's what we ought to do. Don't you?

ROBERT [*slowly*]. But I mustn't leave you alone——

MARIE. You'll be thinkin' of me when you work—an' I'll be thinkin' of you. An' then maybe my love'll do you some good in your work.

ROBERT. I know that now—what is best in me you take away with you.

MARIE. No, Robert, I'd always be in your way!

ROBERT. You would never be in my way!

MARIE [*softly*]. Oh, yes. You can't tell about that. I think I see further than you do. [*Pause.*] But one thing—that you got to promise me. You hear, Robert? You must never worry or reproach yourself on my account. If you did I couldn't have no peace. You must just think that you've hardly known me. You hear, Robert? We got to be true to our bargain.

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ROBERT. You rise so far above me with your faithfulness and your strength! What is it that hinders me from following you? Ambitions! I cast them aside. [*A pause.*] You will be lonely.

MARIE. Not as much as you think. An' I'll have you to think about.

ROBERT. You can't do it! You want to deceive me! I beg of you—don't plunge me into such doubts!

MARIE. Doubts o' what? [*She looks into his eyes with a deep and tragic glance.*]

ROBERT. You *will* be strong——

MARIE. I know what I want. An' even if I don't understand much—I understand you better than your mother an' Hetty put together. You didn't have to tell me about the longin' you felt. I saw it in your eyes. You can take my word for it, I know best. Good-bye.

[ROBERT *starts to put his arms about her.*]

MARIE. If you hold me—you'll only make it harder for us both. Good-bye. I love you.

[ROBERT *kisses her.*]

MARIE [*suddenly losing control of herself for a moment*]. Yes, oh, yes! Kiss me once more! Kiss me once more!

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ROBERT [*kisses her*]. I'll come to you to-morrow.

MARIE. No! Never! You must never come, Robert. [*She goes backward toward the door.*]

ROBERT [*following slowly*]. But I mustn't leave you alone.

MARIE. Do you think that I'm afraid? I'm not afraid. Good-bye. Work hard. [*She gives him her hand.*]

[ROBERT *holds her hand looscly until it drops slowly.*]

MARIE. Give my love to your sister.

[*She hurries out.*

CURTAIN

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